DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 317 941 CG 022 460

AUTHOR Beck, Irene C.; Caps, John, Ed.
TITLE In Tune with Teens: A Guide for Communicating with Adolescents.
INSTITUTION Sheppard Pratt National Center for Human Development, Baltimore, MD.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 90p.
PUB TYPE Guides - General (050)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); *Adolescent Development; *Adolescents; Alcohol Abuse; Delinquency; Drug Abuse; Emotional Problems; Family Problems; Helping Relationship; *Interpersonal Communication; Juvenile Gangs; Parent Child Relationship; Peer Acceptance; Peer Influence; Personality Development; Sexuality; *Youth Problems

ABSTRACT

This guide, intended for adults who deal with adolescents, was originally designed as a companion to "No Hang-Ups!," a telephone tape call-in service ad ressing topics of vital concern to teenagers. The format of the guide consists of a series of brief two-page fact sheets on a wide range of adolescent issues: problems in school, teenage fears, loneliness, peer pressure, puberty, sexuality, violence, gangs, crime and legal problems, personal relationships, alcohol and drugs, family relationships, running away, and seeking help. Each fact sheet starts with a brief overview, discusses the issue from the teenager's point of view, suggests roles adults can play, and lists references on the topic for teenagers and adults. (TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED317941

In Tune With Teens

A Guide For Communicating With Adolescents

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John C. Wolfe

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

THE SHEPPARD PRATT NATIONAL CENTER
FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES
FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

CG 022460

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IN TUNE WITH TEENS

written by
Irene C. Beck, Ed.D.

edited by
John Caps, M.Ed.

cover art by
Gerhardt P. Miller

1st Printing . . . May, 1987
2nd Printing . . . March, 1988
3rd Printing . . . August, 1989

© 1989, The Sheppard Pratt National Center for Human Development
Educational Services for Children and Adolescents

6501 N. Charles Street • P.O. Box 6815
Baltimore, Maryland 21285-6815
(301) 938-3908

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword	1
Introduction	3
Thanks	5
'No Hang Ups'	7
Talking and Listening	9
School: He Can Do Better	11
Dropping Out of School	13
When Parents Divorce	15
The House with One Parent	17
Feeling Lonely	19
What Are Teens Afraid Of?	21
Nobody Understands Me	23
Looking at Your Heritage	25
Self - Esteem	27
Feelings About Death	29
When Teens Feel Left Out	31
Teens and Disabilities	33
Friends: How to Make One, How to Be One	35
Peer Pressure	37
Gangs and Threats	39
In Trouble With the Law	41
Violence	43
Cults: A Battle for the Mind	45
Thinking About Sex	47
The Truth About AIDS	49
Falling in Love	51
Teen Pregnancy	53
Homosexuality and Teens	55
Body Changes	57
Anorexia, Bulimia: The Eating Disorders	59
Teen Depression: Feeling Hopeless	61
Too Much! Handling Stress	63
Why Do Teens Drink?	65
Teens and Drugs	67
When A Parent Drinks Too Much	69
Child Abuse	71
When Parents Can't Help	73
Running Away	75
Brothers and Sisters: Getting Along	77
Handling Anger	79
Seeking and Finding Help	81
Acknowledgments	87
Endorsements	88

FOREWORD

At Sheppard Pratt, a private psychiatric hospital, we work with children, adolescents, their parents and teachers in many ways. We hear their struggles, their concerns, and the several sides to every story.

Our Educational Services for Children and Adolescents at The Sheppard Pratt National Center for Human Development offer seminars, workshops, audio, video and written materials on a wide range of topics. These relate to the psychological needs of youth and their relationships with families and schools.

The Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital provides both outpatient and inpatient services for children, adolescents and their parents seeking therapy.

The Forbush School at Sheppard Pratt teaches both day and residential students at the elementary, middle and senior high school levels. This school provides emotionally disturbed youth an opportunity to continue their education while receiving treatment.

INTRODUCTION

- Every 90 seconds, a teenager *attempts* suicide.
- Every 90 minutes, a teenager *completes* suicide.
- About ½ of all girls between ages 15 and 19 are sexually active.
- Nearly ½ of all high school seniors have used illegal substances.

The sadness of teens has seemingly reached epidemic proportions. Today's adolescents seem to have much more to contend with than in the past. We want to help them, if we can. Yet teens are often hard to reach, and parents may be the last ones they turn to.

You may find it hard to recognize the person your teenager has become. It is easy to see the many physical changes, but hard to accept the mood swings. Teenagers test every rule of the house. They are embarrassed by what other family members do and say. You hear cries of independence and still see snatches of childhood.

It is hard to shift gears as a parent. When your children were little, you made all major decisions and your authority was accepted. As teens mature, they challenge that authority. They need practice in making their own decisions and in making mistakes. Parents can then become guides, advisors and willing ears.

Far too many parents complain that their teenagers seem to go on their own, growing out of their reach. Some parents feel there is little or nothing they can do to influence their children. As frustrating as that can be for parents, poor communication is devastating for the teenager. Adolescents are easily damaged when facing situations and making decisions without their parents' guidance and feedback.

Teens may not agree with what you say. They may choose a different path and make mistakes along the way, but they do listen, even when they least seem to hear you. They need to express their points of view and concerns. It is essential that you listen, but it is also vital that you speak.

IN TUNE WITH TEENS was written for adults who deal with adolescents. It is intended to raise psychological issues that may be difficult to discuss. They can stir up unsettling emotions that tangle the lines of communication. We have recommended readings both for teens and adults on each topic. Some of the books were not available for review at the time of publication.

We hope the following suggestions and ideas can help you talk with your teen, listen, and tell him what you believe is right.

THANKS

The content of this booklet was developed with our professional faculty, clinicians and consultants, who gave unstintingly of their knowledge and expertise.

Dr. Robert Gibson, President and Chief Executive Officer of Sheppard Pratt Hospital, has provided leadership, commitment and support which made this entire project possible.

Dr. John Wolfe, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of The Sheppard Pratt National Center for Human Development, continues his vital direction and support sustaining our efforts.

Diane Proctor, Director of Educational Services for Children and Adolescents, whose administration gives this project continued life.

John Caps worked in editing, giving this booklet clarity, consistency and creativity.

Sylvia Nudler so capably managed its production through several printings.

Anne Fredenburg, Director of Kubie Library at Sheppard Pratt, Dr. Margaret Denman-West, Director of Hoover Library at Western Maryland College, and Dorothy Tassone, Forbush School Librarian, selected books noted for their merit on each topic.

Panels of expert reviewers, representing leading community organizations involved with children and families, gave us generous and enlightened feedback on the content.

Peer counselors from Perry Hall Senior High School in Baltimore, Maryland gave us the teens' point of view.

Dottie Holben and Denise Henschen kept all the pieces together with their excellent secretarial support.

John Hamilton, Cheree Cleghorn, and Pat Mitchell gave us good advice and hearty encouragement.

We enlisted and received the wholehearted support of schools, libraries and community agencies who have made these and additional books available at special displays.

Daniel Chesire gave of his computer expertise, much of his free time and his unswerving adolescent perspective.

The Auxiliary of Sheppard Pratt Hospital lent their support through a generous contribution which funded the start of this project.

We are indebted to the Gannett Foundation for their generous gift to underwrite our printing.

We are impressed with the tremendous support we have received from everyone we've approached. We thank them all for helping us launch such an exciting venture!

As we go into our third printing, we are gratified with the overwhelming enthusiasm we have experienced from parents, grandparents, organizations, guidance counselors, teachers, and principals across the country.

It is reassuring to know that many of us are singing the same song — IN TUNE WITH TEENS.

August, 1989
Baltimore, MD

Irene C. Beck, Ed.D.
Director of Program Development
Educational Services for
Children and Adolescents

Editor's Note:

The masculine pronoun is used for internal consistency. This usage in no way reflects an implication that male teenagers are the primary focus of concern.

"NO HANG-UPS!"

This parent's guide, **In Tune With Teens**, was originally designed as a companion to "No Hang-Ups!", an unprecedented telephone tape call-in service for teenagers. "No Hang-Ups!" was developed as a response to the problems which today's teenagers face in this period of societal change.

Each of the "No Hang-Ups!" tapes addresses a topic of vital concern to adolescents. The tapes provide accurate information and suggestions for teens dealing with their own emotional development and problems with parents, friends or school. Each tape lasts 3-4 minutes and suggests two books to read related to the topic on the tape.

In Tune With Teens can stand alone as a resource of information. The booklet highlights the information given on the tapes, and suggests guidelines for promoting good parent-teen communication. It also provides guidelines for seeking and choosing professional help, and determining when it is needed.

All the "No Hang-Ups!" tapes have one underlying message: if teens feel concerned, confused, upset or worried, they should talk about their feelings with a parent and/or another trusted adult.

"No Hang-Ups!" grew out of Sheppard Pratt's sponsorship of FOR KIDS' SAKE, a public service commitment of television stations across the country to children's needs, and produced in Maryland by WJZ-TV, Channel 13. WJZ's commitment to "No Hang-Ups!" during the pilot phase included news, special programming, public service announcements, printing and distribution of posters, bookmarks and flyers to schools and community organizations throughout Maryland.

The content of the "No Hang Ups!" tapes was developed, reviewed, and endorsed by experts in the field of education and mental health.

TEENAGERS WANT TO LISTEN!

In Baltimore, 33,000 calls were made to request tapes during the first two months of "No Hang-Ups!" service in 1987.

In Cleveland, the United Way Services reported receiving over 26,000 calls when it launched the program in January, 1989.

TALKING AND LISTENING

Sooner or later, most teens feel their parents don't understand them. They don't like the rules and restrictions that parents impose. Some wish their parents paid more attention to what they consider important. They don't feel their parents listen to them.

Sooner or later, most parents of teenagers feel as though they don't recognize their children any more. They feel helpless, as though they're losing control. They fear what's ahead and don't feel as though their children listen to them any longer.

If this sounds familiar, you already know that part of the problem is that adolescence is a period of great change. As a parent, you often can't keep up with those changes unless you and your teen both can talk and listen.

Another part of the problem is the natural tendency most people have to let things drift along until a crisis emerges which demands their attention. Most teens tend to keep their troubles to themselves, making it harder to reach them early.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Some families don't really have a time when everyone gets together and can talk about serious things. Some families, even when they are together, don't communicate. Many teens feel **isolated** from their families.

Some teens **don't know how to express their feelings**. They may never see open, honest give-and-take where people disagree and work things through.

If parents use their teens as confidants, burdening them with adult problems, teens may be reluctant to talk about what is troubling them. They may feel they **shouldn't burden an overloaded parent**.

In other families, when problems are discussed, it is the parent who does all the talking, which is bold and emphatic. The teen has to sit and take it, with no chance to respond. These teens **resent** being talked at and feel **misunderstood**.

Most adolescents see points of view in black and white, all or nothing, with only one side as valid. They can argue minor issues interminably. When their position is not accepted, they often feel **unfairly treated**.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

Common pitfalls to avoid:

- Having unrealistic expectations - yours or your teen's.
- Expecting everyone to agree on everything.
- Wanting to keep peace at any price.

- Trying to keep total control over your teen's actions.
- Using him as a confidant for your own problems.
- Wanting your teen's approval.
- Over-reacting to your teen's behavior or attitude.
- Rescuing him from his mistakes.
- Assuming the worst, that this conflict is a sign of larger problems.
- Turning differences of opinion into power struggles.
- Using sarcasm.
- Using labels or name-calling.
- Making threats.
- Attacking physically or verbally.
- Delivering ultimatums.

As a parent, you can:

- Be a model, more than a critic.
- Set up regular family meetings. Everyone can talk about the week, its problems and high points, and ways to improve troublesome situations.
- Set aside individual time with you and one child at a time, no matter how old he is. Use the time to do something of interest to you both.
- Agree to disagree.
- Praise his appropriate actions and responses.

Use an authoritative approach to discipline, where you:

- Set limits, with brief explanations.
- Hear your teen's feelings and thoughts.
- Modify rules, when sensible.
- Use joint problem-solving. (What are we going to do about this?)
- Hook up privileges with responsibilities.
- Establish consequences to behaviors, which are consistently enforced.

Appeal to the good part of your teen, no matter how small it may seem. Talk to that part of him, and listen between the lines to what he says to you, hearing what he really means.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Summer Begins, by Sandra Asher.
Brogg's Brain, by Kim Platt.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

The Parent's Guide: The STEP Approach to Parenting Your Teens, by Don Dinkmeyer.
Parent Effectiveness Training, by Thomas Gordon.

SCHOOL: HE CAN DO BETTER

"You can do better." Do you ever hear yourself saying that to your teenager? Does it seem like he's not trying, even though he has the ability? Has the motivation that used to be there disappeared?

Are you concerned about his grades, and what they mean for college? What do poor study habits teach him about life? Are you worried that he's not working hard enough? Is the time which should be spent on school being used up in ways that may not seem so positive?

When you try to find out how your teen is doing, do doors slam, or are you reassured that everything's fine - until deficiency slips come home or report cards tell a different story?

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Many things may be getting in the way of your teen's success in school. Some problems may be **family related**. How much worry and pressure is your teen assuming because of these? He needs to know that while your family may have problems, they are not his alone to solve.

Do his **friends** have problems? Is there pressure from them not to do well in order to fit in? For many teens, their social life and romances are top priorities and these can contribute to poor school performance.

Are **drugs, alcohol or tobacco** involved? Teenagers need guidance from their parents here. Once they've become addicted, these are not problems which solve themselves.

How does the **school** see your teen? Most teachers appreciate individual parent interest. Parents often get angry at failing grades, assuming that their child is just not trying hard enough, but **unidentified learning problems** may exist. Inquire about possible testing.

How does your **teen himself** see it all? No doubt, his view will be different from yours - perhaps slightly, probably significantly. Who does he want to be? Does he like where he is now? How does he view your role? What does he think you want from him? How far apart or close are you?

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

No doubt about it, getting through school successfully is your teenager's responsibility - you've been through it already. But you might serve as a guide in some ways:

- Help your teen recognize his work patterns that you've seen over the years. Does he cram at the last minute? Does he think of himself as dumb, and give up before he starts? Does he strike back at you by getting poor grades? Help him guard against these.
- Look at your expectations. What grades do you want him to get? What are your long-range goals for him? Do you compare him to his brother or sister, or to yourself? While some parents do this to motivate, it almost always has the opposite effect. Teens see it as a put-down, and it creates a sense of failure and resentment.
- Make an action plan with your teen. Agree together on what work or grades he will try for. Hook them to certain privileges he wants. Try the plan for a marking period.
- Make sure a daily homework routine is set. Have a specific time and place to study with as few distractions as possible. Parents can probably offer more moral support than academic help just by being nearby and interested.
- Talk with his teachers. Often when grades begin to slide, the joint alliance of parent and teacher is enough to alert a teen that the adults are still concerned authorities.
- Help your teen to identify a special subject interest, in or outside of school. This is an excellent way to develop strong, independent work skills along with friendships.

Try to develop an area where you and your teen can feel good about who he is, where you show your pride and admiration for his success, and where he tastes first-hand the wonderful flavor of accomplishment.

Suggested Readings For Teens:

Tough-Luck Karen, by Johanna Hurwitz.
It Takes Brains, by Erveen Weiman.

Suggested Readings For Parents:

Have You Done Your Homework? A Parent's Guide to Helping Teenagers in School, by Julie Hahn.
How to Help Your Child With Homework, by Marguerite Radenich.

DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

Each day, over 3,000 adolescents drop out of school in the U.S. and do not return. They may drop out for different reasons, but all make their paths to success far more difficult.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Some teens may be at greater risk than others. At risk are students who:

- Have poor academic performance.
- Have repeated a grade.
- Hold time-consuming jobs.
- Have been suspended.
- Are chronically truant.
- Have been in conflict with the law.
- Are male rather than female.
- Are Black, Hispanic or American Indian rather than White or Asian American.
- Are teen parents.

Also at risk are students who are from families:

- Who are poor.
- With a single parent.
- With parents who did not finish high school.
- In urban rather than rural or suburban areas.
- Where activities are not monitored.
- With few aids to study or opportunities for out-of-school learning.
- With no consistent support and encouragement from those who share common values and standards.

Teens who drop out of school often feel they have been **rejected** by the school, that no one there cares about them.

Those who work or have other non-academic interests may not look at the **long-range picture**.

Some teens are **consumed by other problems**, such as pregnancy or drugs, that also need to be dealt with.

Most teens who drop out have poor academic skills, and a long history of school **failure**. Consequently, most have low self-esteem and strong feelings of inadequacy.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can:

- Take a strong interest in your child and his schooling.
- Check frequently with his teachers.
- Arrange a regular time and place for him to study.
- Encourage him to set goals and have a plan to reach them.
- Provide him with interesting non-school activities.
- Help him to face his problems, instead of giving up on them.
- Explore with your teen his fear that he will fail; he may drop out before this occurs to avoid the shame. Encourage him to work with his guidance counselor.
- Model learning behavior for him. Let him see adults continuing to study and learn.

If your teen has already left school, you can encourage him to:

- Continue his education in a variety of ways.
- Find solutions to his particular situation. If the reasons for dropping out are non-academic, help him seek appropriate treatment.
- Identify areas of interest and talent.
- Contact his school district for adult learning opportunities.
- Locate local community agencies for support and advisory services.

Your teen has many decisions to make which are difficult and challenging. Encourage him to talk with other trusted adults for sound feedback. Dropping out of school doesn't have to close the pathway to his future.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

The Running Back, by Robert McKay.
Coming Back Alive, by Dennis Reader.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

What To Do About Youth Dropouts?: A Summary of Solutions, by Margaret Orr.
Motivating and Preparing Black Youth to Work, by Jawanza Kunjufu.

WHEN PARENTS DIVORCE

When parents decide to divorce, children have a difficult time. It may be the best decision, especially if there has been longstanding unhappiness, anger or violence. However, it is never easy.

All parents worry about the effects of divorce on their children. At the time of divorce, most have little time and emotional energy to give to their teens.

All teens know of other families that have separated, but it's not until your own family is involved in a divorce that all the questions and concerns hit home.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Most teens **want to get their parents back together again**, wishing there would be no divorce. This feeling often lasts for years, and dies hard.

Many teens feel **responsible**. They may think there is something they can say or do to make it all work again. Some children feel they've done something wrong. Perhaps, they think, the divorce is their fault, or that their parents only stayed together because of them.

All teens are **frightened** by changes and their implications. They may be afraid of being abandoned by both parents, losing their relationship with the parent who doesn't live at home, and the uncertainty of it all.

All children feel **sad** when they're involved in a divorce. They see their parents' pain and feel their own. It may be hard to stay close when everyone is hurting, and so they may feel alone in their misery.

Some teens may be **angry** at their parents for messing things up, resent all the changes that have to happen, and feel embarrassed for being different at a time in their lives when fitting in is so important.

Teens feel **torn loyalties**. Parents who do not resolve their anger toward the other parent may enlist their child as an ally in ongoing hostilities.

Others try to **deny** that anything is happening at all, so they can ignore the painful feelings and memories.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

All of the above reactions are typical. It is important to leave the door open for teenagers to talk about their feelings.

- If you or your teen aren't ready to talk together, encourage him to find another adult that he trusts who will listen and understand.
- Don't make your child take sides between you and his other parent. Help your child to recognize this when it begins to happen. Encourage him to point it out to you - "I don't want to take sides."
- Try to avoid open conflict with your ex-spouse. Don't use your child as an ally against his other parent, or a bullet in hostilities.
- Try to communicate openly with your ex-spouse, making joint decisions concerning your children. At some point your teen may have a say about which parent to live with. Help him realize that such a choice is based on flexibility, such as who lives closest to school and friends, or who has the most time to be with him right now. It's never a matter of his loving one parent more than the other.
- Everyone in the family needs to be very clear on what areas are changing, and in which ways. Everyone needs to know what each person is responsible for. Even if your teen takes on added responsibilities, you still need to parent him.
- Continually show your teen that you value him and are concerned about his needs.

Divorce is an adult situation. Teens shouldn't have to get caught in the middle. Even though their parents' marriage did not last, teens need to know adults can commit to longlasting relationships as they struggle toward independence and future intimacy themselves.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

What's Best for You, by Judie Angell.
The Divorce Express, by Paula Danzinger.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Helping Children of Divorce: A Handbook for Parents and Teachers, by Susanna Diamond.
Second Chances, by Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakely.

THE HOUSE WITH ONE PARENT

Some families have one parent by choice; others have had it happen to them. Some parents have never married, others are separated or divorced. Still others have been widowed. Regardless of their background, single parents - mothers or fathers - have to handle their own working day, their children, household problems, and, if there's time, some sort of social life.

As a single parent, you have had to struggle with these and other difficulties, and your teenager most likely has had his own problems, too. Almost all teens can list the disadvantages of their situation, if not the advantages. It's essential that parents reflect on their teens' situation, and determine if they need help.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Many teens with single parents think that they're the **only ones** - in the neighborhood, in their class - who live in this kind of family. Yet, about one-third of their peers also have only one parent in the house. They don't want to think of their families as different from others, just at the time that they most want to fit in, to be accepted, to be like everyone else.

If there's been a death of a parent, other family members may be **hard to reach emotionally**. If you're ready, it is important that your teen try to talk with you about the changes in all of your lives. What is going to stay the same? What will be different? Brothers and sisters can pull together, and become even closer than they might have been before.

If you have never married, your teen will have questions and concerns about his **birth** and his **other parent**. If he's adopted, he'll have ongoing issues about his birth parents, as he searches in adolescence for who he is. He will need reassurance that he has not been rejected, but, rather, chosen.

Of course, you're not only a parent. There will be times when you may want to go out, date or see friends. It is important for your teen to understand that **you are not pulling away** from him. You need some time to form adult relationships, but your teen may want to **protect** and **parent** you.

Adolescents who live with one parent often have difficulty leaving home as they become independent. They have a strong sense of **responsibility** to take care of their parent.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a single parent, you can:

- Focus on your teenager's needs and concerns, separate from yours.
- Let your teen know he is not alone.
- Let him know he is not responsible for you, or for any changes that have happened.
- Review the responsibilities you've given him. Are they appropriate? Are they working out?
- Keep adult problems with your finances, other adults, your social or work life, separate from your teen. Don't use him as a confidant.
- Provide opportunities for your teenager to have a say in some of the decisions that affect your family.
- Try to establish a regular family time when you can put feelings into words, make suggestions for changes and get control of the week ahead. This kind of close talk keeps you in touch and can head off many problems before they begin.

Help your teenager realize that the kind of family you have and the changes you go through don't really matter so much. What does count is the love and caring you show each other.

Suggested Readings for Teenagers:

The Kids' Book About Single Parent Families, edited by Paul Dolmetsch and Alexa Smith.

Please Don't Kiss Me Now, by Merrill Joan Gerker.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Solo Parenting: Your Essential Guide, by Kathleen McCoy.

Making Up the Difference - Help for Single Parents With Teenagers, by George Rekers.

FEELING LONELY

Everyone knows what loneliness feels like. For teens, it often comes from being excluded, ignored, or alone at home too much. Feeling lonely doesn't always mean being alone. For instance, you may see your teen as popular, yet inside he may feel lonely. Or the reverse can be true. Your teen may spend more time by himself than you'd like, yet he's comfortable with things as they are.

Teens naturally draw away from their parents as they seek more independence. That is something they need to do alone. Time alone often can be valuable time. This is different from loneliness.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

When teens feel lonely, it may be for **several reasons**. Some try to fit in with a certain group. They may walk away from good grades or school activities, trying to change themselves to fit in. They may alter their appearance, behavior or language until you barely recognize them. As they see it, being an outsider is to be unattractive, unacceptable - lonely.

Some teens want to **stand out**. They want to be different. They value their independence. Their interests may be different. Other teens may single them out or ignore them. Teens who want to stand out have a part of them that wants to be accepted for who they are.

Some teens are naturally **shy**. It may be harder for them to make friends, to take the first steps in connecting with others. They may spend a good deal of time on the fringe, feeling separate from the rest.

Teens who are **home alone** may feel lonely. When there is something exciting or important to share, they have no one to tell it to. Or their parents may be very busy, with never enough time to talk. While they may like the freedom of no supervision, some teens may get lonely.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can:

- Suggest that your teenager look for someone with similar interests in a particular area.
- Encourage him to join activities in or out of school which help to develop enduring interests. Those activities also can provide a natural way of meeting others with whom to share.
- Help him become aware of his strengths. For example, try to identify three good things about him. Refer to them frequently.
- Practice with your teen ways of initiating conversations and extending invitations to others, to help overcome his shyness.
- Deal with his loneliness at home by building in times to talk each week and doing things together for fun.
- Make arrangements to talk by telephone with your teen when he is home alone.
- Try to break up the lonely routine with visits or projects, if possible.

Teens need to know that, although they may feel lonely at times, they are not alone. Being lonely is something they can work out of, often with others who have shared the experience.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Very Far From Anywhere Else, by Ursula LeGuin.
Homecoming, by Cynthia Voight.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

The Handbook for Latchkey Children and Their Parents, by Thomas Long.
Leading a Child to Independence, by Paul McKean.

WHAT ARE TEENS AFRAID OF?

Horror movies, violence in the news, and nuclear weapons are all part of today's world. These often play into teens' fears. Some fears may seem obvious, such as fear of death.

Other fears may come up only at certain times, or about particular things, such as fear of noises in the night, plane crashes, certain places or animals.

Everyone feels fear sometimes. Some adults may tease a teen, though, as if he should have outgrown his fear long ago. In fact, it makes sense to be afraid of some things - a big, unexpected exam, or signs of family problems, for instance.

No matter how old or mature a teen is, or what you might think he should be able to handle, fears are real, legitimate, and need to be dealt with.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Some adolescents develop fears and **don't know what to do** about them. Some fears a teen can deal with; others he has to learn to live with. Most of the time, teens don't want to talk about their fears. It seems stupid to admit they are afraid, even to themselves. Their minds can tell them all the reasons they shouldn't be afraid, and yet they can't get rid of the awful, frightened feeling.

Many teenagers feel **embarrassed** by their fears, alone and very vulnerable. Some may mask these feelings with impulsive, reckless behaviors. Others may withdraw, afraid to come closer. Some are afraid to express their feelings because they are upsetting or may cause conflict.

Many teens fear **ordinary things**. They may be afraid to stand up in class to give a presentation. They may be afraid to approach a new group of teens. They dread the possibility of being made fun of, or talked about behind their backs.

Teen fears come from two main sources: from **without** and **within**. The inner fear is that they will not have control over their own feelings - that they will fall apart, especially in public.

Many teens have a **fear of failing**. They have internalized pressures to perform, and are unsure of their abilities to measure up to expectations. Rather than try and perhaps fail, they may give up without an effort.

Some teens have a **fear of succeeding**, with the accompanying responsibilities which can seem overwhelming.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can:

- Acknowledge that your teen's fears are valid and can be dealt with.
- Help your teen understand what he fears.
- Encourage your teen to confront his frightening situation or feeling, rather than avoid it.
- Check out the power of that fear. Explore the possibilities if the dreaded situation were to occur. Then what?
- Imagine with your teen anticipated difficulties and ways to deal with them.

Through your help in talking about his fears, your teen can better understand them and control them. If he continues to be anxious, or phobic about certain places or events, you might consider seeking professional help to overcome his fear of fear.

Suggested Readings For Teens:

Rainbow Jordan, by Alice Childress.
What Do You Do When Your Mouth Won't Open, by Susan Pfeffer.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Helping the Fearful Child: A Guide to Everyday and Problem Anxieties, by Jonathan Kellerman.
Banishing Fear From Your Life, Bantam Books.

NOBODY UNDERSTANDS ME

"You just don't understand!" Have you ever had these words flung at you by your teenager? Have you both been exasperated by where the other one is or isn't? Maybe you do understand all too well what your child is saying, yet you don't agree with the conclusion he's reached. Or maybe you really don't understand. Your teen keeps changing so fast, it's hard to keep up with him. Maybe you don't know where he's coming from.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

While everyone feels that nobody understands from time to time, no one feels it as strongly or as often as teens do. They're changing more and faster at this stage in their lives than they ever will again. They often **don't understand themselves** and what's happening to them, or to their friends. One of their strongest drives, though, is toward more **freedom.** They see a whole range of possibilities, boundless opportunities. Then they often see parents and teachers as putting unnecessary obstacles in their way.

When they feel isolated and different teens often withdraw or lash out in rejecting ways. They may **highlight the differences** between themselves and others. They may build walls where they don't have to be.

Many teens have a hard time **seeing themselves** as others see them. It is hard for them to pull back from themselves, to see how they appear to others. Are they projecting an image or being angry, alienated or misunderstood? Do they let other people see anything else?

Some teens need to be aware of the way they come across to others. They may inadvertently alienate others by sending wrong signals. Part of being understood is sending clear messages.

Teenagers are usually **absorbed in themselves**, making it difficult to focus on other people. It is important for teens to develop their curiosity and interest in others - to share their likes and dislikes - as a way of finding people who do understand. Part of being understood is learning how to relate to others.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

When they talk with you, their parent, teens need to tell you seriously what their concerns are, not to accuse you. You both need to hear each other out.

As a parent, you can try to strike a balance between giving your teenager room enough to spread his wings, yet staying close enough for him to know you're there when he needs you. Guide him towards self-discipline. That closeness range is different within each family, different for each child.

- Hear your teen's concerns. Voice yours.
- Avoid accusations: "You always . . ." "You never . . .".
- Allow for differences of opinion, different points of view.

Treat those points of view with respect, as you would those of an adult acquaintance or colleague.

- Encourage conversation which doesn't revolve around rules or chores.
- Bend and change where you can.
- Allow him to make choices and decisions different from yours.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Some Other Summer, by Carole S. Adler.
The Moon on a String, by Tricia Springstubb.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Preventing Adolescent Alienation, by Doris Sanford.
Understanding Teenagers: A Guide for Parents, by James Digiacomo.

LOOKING AT YOUR HERITAGE

Sooner or later, all teens become curious about the history of their family. They want to know where their parents used to live, and where their relatives came from.

They begin to have a sense they belong to something larger than themselves - and as they branch out from the family tree, they want to know about their roots.

On a larger scale, teens are interested in learning about their ethnic and racial backgrounds. How does my heritage make me like some other people? How does it make me different?

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Teens are **searching for their identity**. Questions about their heritage are really an attempt to provide answers about themselves; "Who am I? How did I get to be who I am? How am I like my family? How am I different?"

They become keenly aware of and sensitive to the **differences among people**. For many teens, ethics and morality can be all or nothing, good or bad, with little in between. They are often outraged by accounts of prejudice and injustice. This becomes a way of shaping their social values.

Many teens have little or no first-hand knowledge of people outside their families and local community. They can tend to **stereotype** those they are unfamiliar with.

It is often hard for history to come alive for them. Everything before birth is usually seen as **ancient history**. Yet they can become entranced with real-life stories from older generations.

They are looking for **role models** to pattern after. They need to find and identify with adults whose lives are worthy of following.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

Much of a teen's self-esteem and confidence comes from his sense of pride about himself. This, in turn, comes from those closest to him. Teens need to identify with their background in a positive way.

As a parent, you can:

- Broaden the commercial image of success. Television, films and magazines all promote very narrow pictures of happiness, beauty and family life.
- Help your teen to realize that all families have strengths. Each probably has had some trouble as well. Some families have shared a history that includes suffering, hardships, discrimination, illness or poverty. Talk about ways your family may have met these challenges.
- Arrange for family traditions, holidays and special meals that are enjoyable and can be anticipated at regular intervals.
- Encourage your teen to talk to old family friends and relatives when they visit.
- Let him rummage through old picture albums - perhaps of your high school yearbook.
- Talk about the larger-than-life characters who are part of your heritage, and some of the quiet, sturdy people who helped make it all work.

Teens will live in a world different from yesterday's. Their answers to questions may be different as well. But knowing about where they've come from can help to explain who they are, and help them to choose where they want to go.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

The Best Way Out, by Karyn Cheatham.
Hoops, by Walter Myers.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Your Family Heritage, by Ronald Ross.
Debrett's Family Historian: A Guide to Tracing Your Ancestry, by Noel Briggs Currier.

SELF—ESTEEM

When teens have self-esteem they feel good about who they are, believing they are valuable people. They learned how to feel about themselves when they were young. Their families gave them their first mirror and told them about themselves: "You're pretty . . . smart . . . fresh . . . shy."

By the time children reach adolescence, there are many other mirrors influencing their self-esteem, such as friends, school, neighborhood and the larger culture.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Even going into adolescence with the surest sense of self-esteem, most teens struggle. They continually **compare** themselves to others and come up short.

Teens can be judgmental and harsh **critics**, especially of themselves. The need to **conform** is great and the selection process among peers is rigorous. Their self-esteem fluctuates tremendously, depending on how things are going for them.

Many teens see greener grass everywhere they look. They find it hard to believe that even the most popular students can feel lonely. On the other hand, they may scoff at someone's admiration of one of their own strengths.

For **minorities**, a strong self-esteem can be even harder to maintain because it is not always possible to fit easily into a larger culture. There are fewer visible role models to emulate.

Teens who are **different**, perhaps with a disability or with different physical characteristics, often feel like misfits, rather than unique and special.

Some teens may feel ashamed or uncomfortable about their neighborhood, home, economic situation or certain things about their family.

Some teens worry they won't be as successful as they or their parents expect them to be. When there are **unrealistically high standards**, nothing a teen does short of that ideal is good enough.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can:

- Accept your teen for who he is.
- Encourage him to develop his gifts, talents and strengths. Point them out frequently to him, in a praising, supportive way.
- Help him realize that his value as a person rests on more than one or two parts of himself that may dissatisfy him.
- Explain that everyone has some traits that are not in the top ten.
- Avoid comparisons among your children, or with yourself at that age.
- Avoid put-downs and messages with negative expectations.
- Avoid putting your unfulfilled dreams on his shoulders; he needs to dream his own dreams.
- Work with your teen to bolster areas in need of improvement. Much of self-esteem comes from a sense of competence.
- Help him to see the larger picture when he has setbacks.
- Help him set some realistic goals and ways to work toward them.

There will almost always be someone better off and worse off. While parents want teens to follow their lead, they must also encourage their own inner judgment. Believing in himself and trusting his own efforts will assure a teen solid self-esteem.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Rainbow Jordan, by Alice Childress.
Wilted, by Paul Kropp.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Self-Esteem: A Family Affair, by Jean Clarke.
Nourishing Self-Esteem: A Parent Handbook for Nurturing Love, by Earl White.

FEELINGS ABOUT DEATH

Death, we have always been told, is a natural part of life. Yet when it comes close to an adolescent – a loss in the family, or of a friend or pet – death seems a terrible mystery and a surprise. Even a stranger's fatal accident can start a teen thinking about it.

Many teens live in the here-and-now and think of life as interminably long. Most have had few, if any, prior encounters with death. Each child is individual, of course, but typical adolescent responses may be somewhat different from an adult's.

Teens may think of themselves as somehow responsible for the death, or see the loss mainly as it affects them. It may seem like a personal attack, as well as a loss. Their mourning may seem extreme, from hysterical crying to no show of emotion or an unwillingness to talk about it. Their grieving may be sporadic, as they need to get on with their everyday lives. They may struggle between wanting to be adult-like in their reactions and having much the same curiosity and fears of a younger child, without the childish openness to express them.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

The feelings a teen goes through when someone dies are important to talk about. He may feel as though he's been **abandoned**, and may feel cheated or robbed.

Some teens may feel **angry** at the person who has died. A part of them may be asking, "Why did you have to die? How could you leave me? It's not fair!" Now they may be expected to be "more responsible."

Guilt is a common reaction. Teens may feel guilty that they are still alive, or they may have difficulty dealing with their own anger or sense of responsibility. Perhaps they have experienced the suicide of a friend and are blaming themselves for not preventing it. Others may have wished that a long illness would end. Teens need to realize that personal, medical or accidental reasons for death are out of their hands and certainly not their fault.

Most teens feel **scared** that death will come to more people close to them. They may be afraid of what life will be like without that person, of how they will manage, of the new way life will now need to be.

Teens tend to think of themselves as **indestructible**. Many adolescent deaths are related to accidents or recklessness. Teens very much resent adults using the event as an occasion to lecture them on safe habits.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

- Parents can realize that a teen who has encountered death may go through stages of grief:
  - reacting with shock and denial - "It's not true. I can't believe it."
  - facing and suffering the loss - feeling the emptiness of losing the person close to him.
  - accepting the death - and going on with the rest of life.

- It is important that your teen have opportunities to talk to someone close to him, especially when he's facing and suffering the loss.
- Understand that his emotional reactions are appropriate - there are no rights or wrongs in how much a person should mourn.
- Encourage your teen to do something to honor the memory of the person who has died: a note to a relative, or saving a picture.
- Long after the burial, psychological anniversaries - of the death, a birthday, a graduation that might have been - may trigger sadness and renewed mourning.
- Watch for reckless behavior in your teen. Some adolescents seem to dare something to happen to them, by putting themselves in danger.
- Help your teen understand that this recklessness may stem from his feeling that things are out of control. It is often a cry for help.

Death is a part of life that we may never completely accept. But you may be able to help your teen realize that even when we lose someone we were very close to, we never really lose the relationship we had with them.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Tiger Eyes, by Judy Blume.
The Empty Window, by Anne E. Bunting.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

A Family Guide to Death and Dying, by Jim Towns.
A Death in the Family: A Self-Help Guide to Coping with Grief, by Sherri McCarthy.

WHEN TEENS FEEL LEFT OUT

Feeling left out can feel awful for anyone. For teenagers, it can be particularly painful, coming at a time when they so much want and need peer approval and recognition. While it is hard to be the person who feels left out, it can be just as hard, if not harder, to watch a son or daughter feeling like an outsider. If your teenager is disabled, the problem of feeling different and being rejected may seem even worse.

Some adults may say, "Don't worry about it. All teens feel that way some times. They all think they're the only ones who don't fit in. Just go and make some friends. Don't be so sensitive." Other adults, recalling the pain of their own adolescence, may too strongly identify, wanting to solve the problem or spare the pain.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

While some teens fit in easily with the rest of the crowd, there are many others who find it harder to be accepted. **Differences** separate teens. Sometimes others are into sports a teen can't play. Maybe he is bright and others see him as a geek or nerd. Teens can see themselves as different and rejected for physical appearances or mental abilities as well.

Adolescents usually feel as though they are facing problems nobody else has. Their **egocentrism** stands in the way of seeing others' difficulties. Many teens who seem to be on top often feel left out, too. It is almost impossible for your teen to imagine that you once had to confront similar situations and feelings.

Frequently, feelings of rejection come from teens' interpretations. They are so tuned into the differences they see that they may almost dare others to reject them; they **reject others** before they are rejected.

Where there are obvious differences, such as **physical disabilities**, the problem may seem worse. The disabled teen may feel different from others at times. Or, perhaps he feels comfortable but other people see him as different. He may be ignored, if others don't know how to act. They may ridicule him.

Your teen may want to show others the ways in which they are all similar, but **not know how.**

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

Although it is very hard when your teenager feels isolated, you can:

- Model responses to others, such as answers to questions about a disability.
- Talk about your teen's strengths to others, in his presence.
- Help your teen practice ways of presenting himself.
- Help your teen learn to put others at ease.
- Objectively point out any rejecting behaviors you notice.
- Share some memories of your own adolescence.
- Be willing to let your teen take a social risk. Don't try to spare him disappointments or rejection. Encourage his attempts.

Being different is not always a problem requiring a solution. Help your teen focus on a way to feel okay about himself. Help him find what's special that he can not only defend but share with others.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Running Scared, by Jane Morton.
Feeling Free, by Mary Beth Sullivan, Alan Brightman & Joseph Blatt.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Parenting the Learning Disabled: A Realistic Approach, by Rhoda Cummings & Cleborne Maddux.
Loneliness, Pocket Power Series, Hazelden Books.

TEENS AND DISABILITIES

What do people mean when they say someone is disabled? It is a word used to mean any condition that limits a person's abilities to do things. But more and more, depending on the person who has a disability, those limits seem to be coming down.

Disabled people are doing many things teens want to do. They play basketball from wheelchairs and graduate from college. Blind people are becoming teachers and lawyers. People who are mentally retarded are making their own place in the working world.

They succeed because they think of themselves as challenged rather than disabled. Many have accepted themselves, realizing what they may be good at. They understand their limits, but accept those limits as the "rule of that particular game," and they move ahead.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Many disabled teens feel very good about who they are and what they are accomplishing. Some others **doubt themselves** and their abilities, which stops them from moving ahead. They may forget that a disability affects only one small part of a person. Their thinking may be similar to that of a stranger who stares: focusing on the disability and not seeing the whole person.

There are **many kinds of disabling conditions**, of course. Some can be seen; others are not as visible. Some are permanent. Some can be treated with medication. In any case, there is no way in which being disabled is a person's fault. It is something that has happened.

People are often **curious** to know what your teen's disability is like, and what he does to cope with it. It is his decision to respond - whether to relate to the questioner, feeling at ease, or perhaps feeling embarrassed or violated.

Most people **do not know much about disabilities**. Others may ask blunt questions or make a joking comment. They are handicapped in their ignorance. But they will learn more only by gaining some experience with disabled people who are willing to share with them when it is appropriate.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent of a disabled teen, you can:

- Let your teen describe his disability in positive terms to others.
- Encourage your teen to become comfortable in deciding when to talk about his disability.
- Point out that others' moods or reactions may not have anything to do with his disability.
- Practice things he might say to others, how to use humor, how to share and explore common interests.

If your teen is talking to someone he'd like to have as a friend, or will see often, it is usually best to give some information about his disability. With other people, such as a stranger in a shopping mall, he might choose not to explain. It is up to him to make the choice that is in his own best interest.

Helping your teenager to challenge himself, as his disability has challenged him, can be a real challenge for you.

Suggested Reading for Teens:

Like It Is; Facts and Feelings About Handicaps From Kids Who Know, by B. Adams.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Parenting Children With Disabilities, by Peggy Miezo.
Steps to Independent Skills Training for Parents and Teachers of Children With Special Needs, by Bruce Baker.

FRIENDS: HOW TO MAKE ONE, HOW TO BE ONE

Some teens seem to have hundreds of friends. They draw others to them; they seem to be popular without even trying. Others have just one or two close friends. They still get along with the rest of their peers, but maybe just two of them get together to do things.

There may be times when your teenager seems not to have any friends. Maybe you've just moved, or he's started a new school. He or his old friends may have changed lately. This may bother your child.

Sometimes a teen is not concerned about a lack of friends, but perhaps you are. He may be content with his network, but you may feel he's not popular enough.

In any case, it isn't important to count the number of friends your teenager has. People choose friends, often without thinking about it, for three basic reasons. They often are alike in their interests. Friends enjoy time together because they can talk and share activities they're both enthusiastic about.

Friendships also start because people are similar, in feelings, personalities or reactions.

The third way friendship usually begins is by convenience: your child gets to know the others in his classes or those who live nearby.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

The friendships teens have when they begin adolescence can undergo many changes. They can develop **different** interests and beliefs that now don't match. They may make new close friends who share current feelings or interests. These may or may not change old friendships.

Losing old friends and struggling to adjust to changes in long-lasting friendships can be very **painful**. Teen friends seem to switch a lot. An old, close, friend may drop your teen because he wants to impress someone else. Maybe your teenager decides to choose a different group of friends. In any case, sometimes these differences blow over, sometimes they increase until friends drift apart.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

You can encourage your teen to:

- Listen to a friend's problems and interests.
- Accept the other person as he is.
- Accept their differences as well as their similarities.
- Compromise when they disagree.
- Stand by his own beliefs and values, regardless of what someone else does.
- Forego continual competition.
- Avoid taking criticism too seriously.
- Earn a friend's trust by keeping confidences.

If you don't like your teen's friends, talk about your objections. Spend time getting to know these teens. Encourage your teen to get to know many other types of people.

Stay away from disagreements between your teenager and his friends. Avoid taking sides against other parents. Teen squabbles often are shorter-lived than those of adults.

Help your teen develop strategies for approaching new people. Practice introductions; encourage him to join organizations related to his interests.

Whether you or your teen is concerned about his popularity, it isn't important to count the number of friends he has. What is important to convey is to value the quality of friendship he is able to offer and share.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

The Once in a While Hero, by Carole S. Adler.
A Place Apart, by Paula Fox.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Teens Can Make a Difference, by Kathleen Zaffore.
The Socially Competent Child. A Parent's Guide to Social Development From Infancy to Early Adolescence, by Anita Gurian.

PEER PRESSURE

Every teen, no matter how independent and self-confident he may be, is subject to peer pressure. The influence that other teens may have over your child, the things they do, and the decisions they make, can boggle your mind.

As a child moves into adolescence he naturally drifts away from parents as his main source of information and advice. Teens gravitate toward each other naturally, and their opinions and judgments take precedence over most others.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

As most teens see it, **adults just don't understand**. In their need for independence, teens have to separate from their parents. They rebel in order to create their own view of life and themselves.

There is real **strength in numbers** when you are unsure of yourself. The shaky adolescent self-image, especially without the familiar adult backup, now needs new supports. Teens look for these in their peers.

Teens often mistakenly seek the same, solid support from their friends that they have been used to in their family relationships. Yet, other teens are most likely not mature enough to provide it. The **relationships** between adolescents can be very **rocky and tumultuous**.

There is tremendous **pressure to conform**. Most teens are fiercely proud of their independence in dress, for instance. Yet you can readily identify a group of friends by the uniform they all wear. What is important here, though, is that they are independent of the family dress code, and need the reassurance of the group identity.

Most teens **fear rejection**, and some will do almost anything to avoid it. Teens often twist and bend trying to please others.

Teens are **unsure of their new identity** and want continual **feedback** from others. They struggle with trusting their own judgment, and want the opinions of others. Much of their pastime is spent talking on the telephone, writing notes or holding endless conversations, critiquing themselves, others, and life.

Teens may travel from one group to another for awhile, or cling possessively to a few close friends.

As teens gradually accept themselves, they summon up the **courage** to go against the crowd when it is in their own best interest to do so.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can:

- Expect your teen to move away from your family as his sole source of information and advice.
- Anticipate that he will be torn between spending increasing time with his friends and less time with his family.
- Try not to set your family times in opposition to his time with friends.
- Work together toward a negotiated agreement on family time.
- Give your teen as many opportunities for positive encouragement and support as his peers give him.
- Welcome his peers; get to know them.
- Avoid choosing his friends, or forbidding him to associate with certain others. This will only weaken your position and set up strong resistance. Rather, set limits on his behavior, and elicit his acceptance of these rules. These rules hold, regardless of the group he is with.
- Warn him against these and take stronger action in curbing his activities, if his friends are into reckless or dangerous activities.
- Realize his powerful need for acceptance by his peers.
- Provide him as much freedom of choice as possible on non-essential decisions.

Do not underestimate the power of your teens' peer group, nor overestimate his ability to withstand their pressure.

At the same time, continue to express your point of view and stay open to hearing his. Teens often listen when you least expect them to.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Letter Perfect, by Charles Crawford.
The Trouble With Soap, by Margery Cuyler.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Teenagers and Peer Pressure, by Stephen Williford.
Peer Pressure Reversal: An Adult Guide to Developing a Responsible Child, by Sharon Scott.

GANGS AND THREATS

Many teens have had some contact with a gang. Many have been asked or pressured to join a gang. Others have been harassed or intimidated by gang members.

While gangs have been around for a long time, their growth and violence have recently surged. Many people are affected by their activities.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

For some teens, growing up around gangs is **commonplace**. In the past, members were recruited in junior or senior high school, and left in late adolescence.

Today, many of the older members are remaining, not moving on to jobs or military service. The gangs are **larger** and **tougher**. Some teenagers have older brothers or fathers who were members of the same gang.

Teens join gangs for a **sense of belonging**. For many, the role models they look for can't be found at home. There is a structure to gang life that is appealing to some teens living in a chaotic family life.

Some join gangs for **protection**. In violent areas, many teens are alienated from the police and other authorities. The adults in the community also fear the gangs and street crime. By joining, a member has protection for himself and those he cares about.

Most teens do not take seriously their parent's concern for their safety. Feeling invulnerable, many teens court the **glamour** of the gang life.

Other teens get caught in the line of fire - as actual **victims** of shoot-outs, or as objects of taunting.

Some teens feel caught in a **dilemma** between joining a gang or being known as a 'homeboy', tied to a mother's apron strings.

To some, gang life holds the **promise of power and money**. Drug dealing and theft are quick sources of money, attractive to teens who may see no way of legitimate success ahead.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can:

- Protect your child, providing as much safety as possible.
- Work with your child's school and other community organizations to keep gang influences away.
- Take seriously your teen's concerns over gang threats or harassment.
- Try to provide as much structure and interest in your teen's life as possible.
- Be sure not to excuse or ignore signs of illegal or troubled behavior. Seek professional help.

Realize that teens who are least vulnerable to gang pressure are those who:

- Have a strong sense of personal values from home or church.
- Know what is important in their own lives.
- Choose their friends carefully.
- Have strong interests to occupy their time.
- Have plans for their future.
- Work to prepare for those plans, by joining related organizations, or learning ways to express their talents.

Teens need a place to belong, to feel safe, at home, to be paid attention to, to be valued and respected. Adults in a community can work together to provide this for all their youth.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

LeRoy and the Old Man, by William Butterworth.
A Shadow Like Leopard, by Myron Levay.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Inside a Teenage Gang, by Janet Green.
Youth Gangs, by Edward Dolan, Jr.

IN TROUBLE WITH THE LAW

Young people don't have to be hardened criminals or longtime delinquents to get in trouble with the law. The most common crimes among teenagers today - drug possession, shoplifting and vandalism - are committed by teens with no prior indicators of trouble in their backgrounds or personalities.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

For many young teens, getting in trouble is only a **by-product of their wanting to be accepted** by their peers. They often go along with someone else's idea, and get in over their heads without realizing it.

Teens **seeking approval** will do what they think is necessary to be accepted by their group of friends.

Some teens feel **alienated and powerless**. They describe a sensation of a power surge when they commit a crime.

Other teens are crying out for **emotional support** and **attention**. By acting out, they may try to focus their parent's attention onto them and away from other family problems.

Some teens are **angry** and want **revenge**. The embarrassment of arrest may be a way of striking back at a parent. Or it may provide an opportunity to accuse the parent of having failed them.

Some teens may not have adopted society's view of a crime. For example, many teens do not think having a fake identification card and illegally obtaining alcohol is a serious crime.

Some teens have not developed **constructive ways of passing time** and channeling their talents and energies. Hanging out and cruising for endless hours can set the stage for mischief.

Some teens feel **insulated from consequences**. They assume that, no matter what trouble they cause, they will be bailed out and suffer no really serious punishment.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can look at your teen's overall development and ask:

- Is the current problem part of a pattern of lying or misrepresenting situations?
- Does he destroy property?
- Is he truant?
- Does he fight with others, often hurting them?

Such behavior indicates the possibility of serious difficulties. You need to follow through with getting outside help.

Realize that you are not responsible for your teen's crime. However, use this opportunity to re-examine the views you have been teaching him. Check your family's values about obeying the law, such as:

- Does he hear you talking with pride about cheating on your taxes?
- Does he have to lie about his age to get a child's price when the family goes to the movies?
- Do family members bring home office supplies or motel "souvenirs"?
- Do you obey traffic laws only when there is danger of being stopped?
- Have you covered for him in past brushes with authorities?

While all children need their parents' support in times of trouble, older teens especially also need to accept the consequences of their behavior.

- Do not help your teen to avoid the outcomes of his actions.
- Do not invite your teen to disagree with other authority figures.
- Help your teen to anticipate future consequences to his actions. Impulsive behavior can be re-directed.

Serious criminal involvement or patterns of general disturbance should not be excused or ignored. Get professional help for your teen and your family. You can't prevent criminal activity alone.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

The Disappearance, by Rosa Guy.
Angel Dust Blues, by Todd Strasser.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Children and Crime: Why Some Kids Get in Trouble and What Parents Should Know About It, by Stanton Samenow.
Parenting and Delinquent Youth, by Alice Parizeau.

VIOLENCE

We see violence all around us. It's on the news, television cartoons, and, more than likely, in neighborhoods and lives around us. Reports of criminal and domestic violence are increasing each year.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Most teens are a little **scared** of violence. They feel vulnerable and helpless when it starts to threaten them.

At a distance, though, many teens, especially males, seem **fascinated** by it. They enjoy watching stunts, violent action and risk-taking. Often they do not think of pain, suffering and death when viewing violence.

Teens learn **empathy**, that is, feeling for another's situation, in their early years. Those who can identify with the plight of others often turn away from violence.

Teens who have been **victims** of physical, sexual or emotional abuse may identify with their aggressor. In some cases, that person can be a powerful, though negative, role model.

Teens who have **difficulty in developing adequate** social **skills** may turn to bullying and intimidation as a way of exercising a sense of power. Teens are often initially surprised at the reactions they can elicit from others by being tough.

For some teens, it becomes a **familiar way of life**. Street crime, adults and older teens with criminal records, easy access to weapons, can all predispose teens to tolerate a higher level of violence.

Teens who **feel unprotected** by adults often turn to violence as a distorted form of self-protection. They may feel the need to be aggressive so that they will not be victimized.

Teens who do not see a way to obtain legitimately what they want may turn to violent crime as an **easy solution**.

Violence can often be the **by-product of other activities**, such as drinking or doing drugs.

Violence often erupts when there is **tension** in a setting, and when there is ongoing **harassment**.
All teens need to feel **psychologically safe**. That is impossible with the threat of violence.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can:

- Protect your child from family violence. While parents need to discipline their children, using a weapon or causing physical injury does not help anyone. Children should not be subjected to any abuse. If you or your child are in that kind of situation, seek help immediately.
- Protect your child from as much violence as possible. Monitor his exposure to television and movie violence.
- Talk with him about his views of violence. Express your own.
- Realize that self-defense is an important part of every child's ability to protect himself. How this is done, and to what extent parents permit physical fighting, is the decision of each family. Let your child know where you stand. Help him to abide by your rules, and be understanding of his responses.
- Work with community leaders and authorities who attempt to curtail violence in your neighborhood.
- Teach your child to respect the rights of others.
- Rehearse with your child actions he would take if he should be threatened with violence.
- Help your teen identify others he would turn to for help, should he need it.

Teens need to know that adults will continue to provide protection and guidance, even as they get older. Living with a sense of physical and emotional safety is a large part of creating a life without violence.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Death Run, by Jim Murphy.
The Young Landlords, by Walter Myers.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family, by Murray Strauss.
Parents' Guide to Streetproofing Children, by Richard Gossage & Melvin Gunton.

CULTS: A BATTLE FOR THE MIND

Does it seem that your teen has joined a small, unknown religious or political group? Has his basic personality changed? Does he no longer have time for friends and activities he used to love?

Teens who become involved with cults often are caught up with the rules and ideas of their new group. They may seem at a distance, unable to listen and hard to reach.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Teens can be quite **impressionable** and persuaded by a fresh point of view. Many teens are drawn to attractive political or social ideas. They easily can be drawn into get-rich-quick promises by commercial cults.

Teens who are **loners** are often vulnerable to cult membership. They very much want to belong to a group, but have often been rejected by peers.

Many teens are not particularly interested in the beliefs of the cult, but are more **interested in their activities** and **symbols**, such as clothing, hairstyles or music.

Some teens like the identification with something that is **foreign to adults**.

Teens are often taken with the **power** that cult leaders convey. They are drawn to the **rituals** that celebrate the group.

Elements of **secrecy** appeal to their sense of privilege in membership.

Many teens are **generous** with their possessions, and give freely of what they have to the cult.

Teens may seem to often **drift away**, absorbed in new music, posters, dress, symbols and rhetoric.

Most teens are probably **unaware of all the underpinnings** involved with a particular cult; belonging is far more significant to them.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can become familiar with cult characteristics, such as:

- Cults are usually built around one living leader who is considered by the group as all-powerful, and who demands obedience from every group member.
- Cults attempt to control the minds of their members.
- Some cults, such as Satanic cults, are involved in self-worship.
- Cults put their own goals and welfare above the concerns of any one individual.
- Cult members spend much of their time and energy recruiting members and fundraising.
- Cults often recruit in non-traditional places such as recreation centers, downtown areas and schools.
- Commercial cults use training programs and promises of easy money as a lure for new members.
- Cults try to separate their new members from their old ties, creating new loyalty to their rules.
- Cults often use guilt as a means of control over their members.

The early signs of cults are not always obvious, and your teen may be persuaded to their point of view before you realize what is going on.

You can call the Cult Awareness Network locally or at National Headquarters in Chicago, (312) 267-7777, for information and advice.

It is vital that you take any steps needed to help your child disengage from the cult and its influence.

Suggested Readings for Parents and Teens:

Mindbenders, by Jack Sparks.
Mind-bending, Brainwashing, Cults and ... by Lowell Streiker.
Materials from the Cult Awareness Network:
2521 West Pratt Boulevard
Suite 1173
Chicago, IL 60645

THINKING ABOUT SEX

Today's teens hear and see a lot about sex in films, magazines and television. It seems to be used as a selling agent for almost any product imaginable. Yet there are probably many things your teenager still wants to know about.

Most parents have a very hard time talking with their teens about sex. Still, they continually worry about their safety. As a parent, you may have told your children where babies come from, but maybe not much more has been said since then.

Some parents wait indefinitely for questions to come. Other parents are reluctant to talk about anything more than "the plumbing." They fear their teen may see such open discussion as a go-ahead signal. Some parents do what their parents did - say nothing and hope nothing is going on.

Yet the statistics tell us differently. Approximately one-half of all girls between ages 15 and 19 are sexually active. Medical concerns related to sex and pregnancy are the number one health problem of adolescents today.

Apart from the social controversies around sex education in schools, contraception and abortion, families need to talk among themselves about their own values, expectations, concerns and problems.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Most of what teens know about sex they've learned from other adolescents. Much of that **information** may not be accurate. For instance, many girls who are sexually active do not know what their fertile time of the month is.

Most teens are concerned about their **bodies** and their **rate of development**. They need to know what growth and change is ahead and have some reassurance that each person develops at his own rate. Comparisons are unfair.

Dating is of prime interest. Both boys and girls can do the asking these days, but possible rejection can be difficult.

Many teens are confused while excited by the prospects of sex. They often become physically involved for the **wrong reasons**: it's the sophisticated thing to do, it will sound good to tell others, they hope the person will "belong" to them, they try to make the relationship deeper than it is, they want to "prove" that they love the other person, or they feel pressured to consent. Many say they just don't know how to get out of a pressured situation.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

Your teen will be faced with many choices and decisions about sex for a long time to come. Those decisions will be based on your views, family religious beliefs, peer pressure, societal messages and your child's own interpretation of all of these.

You might:

- Talk about what's needed to make wise choices and decisions - information, awareness of consequences, options, serious thought, discussion.
- Talk with your teen about news articles, movies, or television programs dealing with sexuality. Hear his viewpoint. Express yours.
- Let your teen know your beliefs about sexual activity, meaningful relationships, and birth control.
- Make sure your teen has information about how pregnancy can occur and be avoided, dangers and consequences of pregnancy, and sexual diseases.
- Go over probable situations and alternative ways your teen can act and react in a tempting situation, how to say no, and how not to send the wrong "signals" to someone else. Talk about 'date rape' and the teen's role in avoiding such a situation.
- Help your teen to avoid getting "set-up," with too much time, empty houses, drugs and alcohol.
- Help your teen to think ahead about decisions, not waiting until he finds himself in a tempting situation.
- Convey an openness to talk, respecting his privacy but willing to listen.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

The Writing on the Wall, by Lynne R. Banks.
Changing Bodies, Changing Lives, by Ruth Bell.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Sexuality and the Adolescent, by Jerelyn Schultz.
Parent's Guide to Teenage Sex and Pregnancy, by Howard Lewis.

THE TRUTH ABOUT AIDS

AIDS can be frightening as well as fatal. Adults fear not only for themselves, but for their adolescents as well. As a parent, you can't control your teenager's behavior. The best way to protect him is to educate him. He has probably heard a lot about AIDS already, but he may be confused, afraid, or have wrong information.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is caused by the HIV virus which breaks down the body's immune system. In other words, it stops the body's natural ability to fight off other diseases. There is no cure for it yet, but scientists do know how it spreads and how it can be avoided.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Most teens **think they are not vulnerable** to AIDS. They think of themselves as almost indestructible. While the number of teen AIDS cases is statistically small, adolescents are often at risk because of their behaviors. Many teens are already **sexually active without taking precautions**. Many are also **experimenting with drug use**. Both behaviors are potential sources of exposure to the HIV virus.

Teens who are sexually active tend to be **casual about their risk-taking**. The more sex partners a teen has, and the more sexually active his partners have been, the greater the risk of becoming infected. However, only one sexual contact with an infected person can give a teen AIDS.

Many teens are **embarrassed to talk about AIDS**. They regard it as disgusting and removed from them. Yet recent studies show they want more information.

Teens are often **unsure about ways of contracting AIDS**. They need to know it can't be caught the way they catch a cold - just by being around others who have it. AIDS is harder to get. It is not carried in the air or in water. They can't catch it from sharing food, shaking hands, or drinking from another person's glass. They can't get it from touching doorknobs, or using public drinking fountains or public toilets. They won't get it by being in the same class with a person with AIDS. Most body fluids, such as saliva, tears, sweat and urine do not contain enough HIV to spread the virus.

Teens are sometimes **insensitive** to the pain of others. Persons with AIDS and their families often suffer the added burden of other people's fear, prejudice and rejection. Teens need to realize the fight is against disease, not people.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can:

- Learn as much as possible about AIDS.
- Start talking. Don't wait for your teen to raise the subject.
- Find out what he knows, thinks and feels about AIDS.
- Try not to act shocked by what you may hear.
- Correct any wrong information and ideas.
- Teach him how he can and cannot get AIDS.

Teens need to know:

- Anyone can get AIDS - male, female, heterosexual or homosexual.
- AIDS can best be avoided by making good decisions and avoiding high risk behaviors, such as sexual contact and intravenous drug use.
- The AIDS virus is usually spread during sexual contact or from sharing intravenous drug needles.
- Pregnant women can infect their unborn or newborn children.
- Ear-piercing and tattooing can be risky, if unsterilized needles are used.
- Sexually active teens should practice the safest sex possible. Avoid any exchange of body fluids, including semen, vaginal fluids, blood, urine and feces.
- Latex condoms should be used during all types of sexual contact. When used correctly, they can help lower the risk of getting AIDS. A foam, cream or gel with nonoxynol-9 in it may help further. Some condoms have it in them.
- Hugging and social kissing, such as kisses on the cheek, are safe.
- You can't tell if a person has AIDS just by looking at him. Someone may have AIDS for years and not know it.
- A person can be tested to determine if he is infected. Blood screening tests are available at local health centers. Teens and adults may receive counseling as well at these free, anonymous clinics. There are also AIDS hotlines in your area.

It can be awkward talking about AIDS. But don't let your discomfort or nervousness stop you from protecting your teen.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

AIDS: What Does It Mean To You?, by M. Hyde & E. Forsyth.
Everything You Need to Know About AIDS, by Barbara Taylor.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

How To Talk To Your Teens and Children About AIDS, by The National PTA.
When Someone You Know Has AIDS, by Alan Nourse.

FALLING IN LOVE

Some teens base the success of their whole school year on whether or not they're in love through most of it. They feel terrible, as though something is wrong, if they're not going with someone.

The need to be in love is striking earlier and earlier. What used to be high school infatuations have moved into junior high and even down to the elementary grades. The pressure is on to fall in love. Fourth graders may go together for as short a time as several hours.

Many parents treat these episodes as "puppy love," and in many families this becomes fair game for much humor. Some parents may become concerned with how boy-crazy or girl-crazy their teen is, or concerned when their child doesn't show any interest, while his friends are already dating.

The real purpose of dating may get lost in the pressure to feel in love. Dating is a way to meet people, to have a good time, to get to know people, and to develop social skills. For teens, dating should not be a way to find someone to spend the rest of their lives with.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Most teens are **excited** and **pressured** about falling in love. It's seen as "the thing to do." Many teens love the idea of love and romance and can let those feelings sweep them away. They may see the other person as they want him to be. They fall in love with that picture - part truth, part fantasy - rather than with the other person.

Often, when teens fall in love, it is **all-consuming**. They can give their full attention to it. They may see that person exclusively, dropping friends, activities or grades, all in the name of love. Being obsessed is often equated with being in love.

Falling in love as a teen can be a **self-centered** state. Teens may enjoy how they're feeling, without having much thought for the other person. Many young people think that being popular means having gone with many boyfriends or girlfriends. They count their conquests, more interested in their ability to attract others than to relating well to them.

In another way, falling in love can be **painful**, because young love seldom lasts long. Breaking up can be hard, but is normal in teen relationships. Some teens want to hold onto a faltering relationship, pushing it to become more serious, as a way of forestalling the inevitable.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can help your teen through young love if you:

- Avoid condescending phrases such as "puppy love."
- Talk about the differences between the romantic feeling of falling in love and loving. Loving involves commitment, respect and hard work.
- Help him realize the time to change a relationship —
  - when little things the other person does bother him a lot.
  - when he feels the other person wants to control him.
  - when the couple argues more than they enjoy each other.
  - when he keeps trying to be someone he's not, just to please the other person.
  - when he's sad more than happy.

- Assure him that it's okay to move on, when your teen is ending a relationship.
- Help him to be honest with the other person.
- Encourage him to talk to the other person directly.
- Gently assure him that teen loves rarely are forever.

If you disapprove of your teen's boyfriend or girlfriend:

- Explain your objections.
- Make opportunities to get to know the other person.
- Work toward an understanding that the relationship is only one way of trying to meet a wide range of people.

If you approve of your teen's boyfriend or girlfriend:

- Avoid encouraging your teen to get too serious too soon.
- Explore your or your teen's motivations, such as making a good catch, or settling for the first person to show an interest.
- Avoid putting your own anxieties onto your teen.
- Help your teen to enjoy the growth that goes with a positive young relationship.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Up in Seth's Room, by Norma F. Mazer.
My First Love and Other Disasters, by Francine Pascal.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

First Love: A Young People's Guide to Sexual Information, by Ruth Westheimer.
How to Help Your Teen Postpone Sexual Involvement, by Marion Howard.

TEEN PREGNANCY

Over six hundred thousand babies are born each year to teenage mothers. Few of these adolescents ever finish their education. Most women who were teenage mothers live their lives in poverty. Most children born to teenage mothers spend at least part of their childhood in a single parent family.

Children having children has become a national epidemic. While some parents have a difficult time broaching the subject with their teens, it is imperative that they speak. The potential problems are far too great for teens to be left on their own to shape their own values, beliefs, attitudes and decisions. Parents need to guide their sons and daughters in making wise choices in becoming sexually responsible.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Many teenagers are becoming sexually active, surrounded by:

Misinformation

- "It's okay to have sex. I'm too young to get pregnant."
- "You can't get pregnant the first time."
- Many teenage girls do not know when they are fertile.

Magical Thinking

- "It won't happen to us."
- "We won't go all the way."

Myths

- "Taking precautions takes the romance out of sex."
- "Being spontaneous is being sophisticated."

Mixed Feelings

- Preparing to use birth control shows they are sexually active. Many teens don't want to admit they are.
- Some teens may be reluctant to have sex, but do so to 'prove their love'.
- Some teens want to abstain, but don't feel that is a valid option.

Excitement

- Some teens enjoy the risk of taking chances.
- Many are excited by the idea of pregnancy. They may see it as —
  - a new identity.
  - a permanent tie to boyfriend/girlfriend.
  - a way to feel useful.
  - an opportunity to love and be loved by someone all their own.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

A pregnant teen needs to make hard choices, none of which she may be ready for - abortion, adoption, raising the child herself.

Her decisions may not include or agree with the perspective of the young father.

She may no longer be one of the group. If she rears her child, she becomes more dependent on her parents than ever before - for money, child care and help of all kinds.

As a parent, you can:

- Establish rules with your teen about dating, social activities and curfews. While they may call you old fashioned, many teens feel comfortable falling back on your rules as an easy way out of a difficult situation.
- Openly talk with your teen about your values and beliefs concerning love, commitment and young relationships. Hear his concerns, pressures and feelings.
- Make sure your teen is informed about sexual activity, its consequences, and ways to avoid pregnancy. Emphasize that abstinence is a very valid option.
- Initiate conversations about sex with your teen; he rarely will. Even if the conversation dies quickly, you've sent the message that it's okay to discuss matters that may be troubling.
- Contact professionals in your local community to provide you with information, resources or support, if you or your teen need help in dealing with teen pregnancy.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Saying the Big-Deal Baby, by Louise Armstrong.
Lauren, by Harriett Luger.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Teen Pregnancy, by Sonia Bowe-Gutman.
A Parent's Guide to Teenage Pregnancy, by Margaret Brownley.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND TEENS

People vary in sexuality, as in many other things. Adolescents begin to explore their sexuality, finding what they like and dislike in partners. For some, this includes exploring sexual experiences, fantasies or relationships with people of the same sex. This may happen to teens who end up being totally heterosexual.

In our society, most friends and parents expect everyone to be heterosexual. Some people believe it is a sin or wrong to be homosexual. Others can't understand how a person could have sexual relations or a romantic involvement with someone of the same sex. These people might make life difficult for someone they think may be homosexual.

Since nobody can tell another person's sexual orientation just by appearance, it is not unusual for people to be accused of being gay who are not. Some people mistakenly think that men who are effeminate or women who seem masculine must be homosexual or lesbian. This is an old-fashioned idea which is not true. Most gay people cannot be recognized as such by others.

People are surprised to learn that many teens have had homosexual experiences, and that as many as ten percent of all teens might be bisexual or gay.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

When they first become aware of their sexual fantasies, many teens are **surprised** that the content of these fantasies is not what they had anticipated.

For most teens, fantasies are clearly heterosexual and there is no confusion.

Sexual experimentation has its **risks**, both psychological and physical. Having a homosexual experience does not mean an individual is gay. Nor does having a successful heterosexual experience prove an individual is not gay or bisexual.

It is often **difficult** for a teen **to find others to talk to**, to gain a better understanding of himself. It is often not safe to tell classmates about one's sexuality, if it is different from theirs.

Keeping homosexuality a secret can be part of a problem leading a teen to feel **guilty** and **withdrawn** from others.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

It is not known why some young people have a homosexual orientation, while others have only a heterosexual one. Most professionals believe homosexuality is not a disease one contracts nor a condition one chooses. Rather, it is a part of a person, and will be important in choosing the way to live.

- It is critical for teens who are sexually active to take precautions against sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS.
- If a teen has troubling concerns, he might do well to talk with someone familiar with adolescence and knowledgeable about homosexuality issues.

As a parent, it may be difficult to adjust to your teen's sexuality or confusion. It is important to:

- Not reject your teen if he expresses a homosexual orientation.
- Realize it is difficult for teens to raise the topic.
- Try not to be overwhelmed by your own feelings of guilt or suspicion.
- Realize that sexuality is only one part of your teen. Don't lose sight of the whole child.
- Seek help for a teen struggling with others' taunts.
- Learn more about homosexuality through organizations, such as Parents of Gays.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

One Teenager in Ten, by Ann Heron.
Reflections of a Rock Lobster, by Alan Fricke.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

A Family Matter: A Parent's Guide to Homosexuality, by Charles Silverstein.
Gay. What Teenagers Should Know About Homosexuality and the AIDS Crisis, by Morton Hunt.

BODY CHANGES

Adolescence is a time of tremendous physical change, when your child's body goes through a transformation from childhood towards young adulthood. It comes at a time when teens are already trying to fit in with others.

Part of a teen's self-concept comes from how he looks and what image he has of himself compared with others. When his image keeps changing because his body is growing so rapidly, your teen may have a hard time knowing who he is or how to present himself to other people.

Many teens cope with body changes by changing styles in hair or clothing. They seem to change their image just by changing clothes. They often choose what to wear according to the group they want to identify with. They build their self-image on the examples of others. Typically, they see the way others behave or appear, and then pattern themselves on that image.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

In any junior or senior high school, in any particular grade, you will see **vast size differences**. Small students look as though they have skipped several grades; bigger, older-looking teens seem ready to graduate. While some feel okay about these vast differences, most teens are self-conscious. They may be bothered by these body changes and feel puzzled, embarrassed and a little lost.

In addition to external changes, there are **internal changes** as well. Hormones that regulate your teenager's growth also change his moods. He may frequently be on edge, or in a temper that is new or unsettling. New feelings are mixed with old ones. These new emotional swings go with being a teen.

Self-image raises problems for many teens. Recent studies indicate most pre-teen and teenage girls **diet** and think of themselves as fat. In reality, few of them are. Some go to great lengths dieting and exercising, aiming for an elusive image. Some remain dissatisfied with themselves for not achieving their ideal. For some, this distorted view of themselves can lead to eating disorders, which require professional help.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

A teen's view of himself may be very different from the way others see him. It is important for him to not be too self-conscious about criticism. He needs to feel he has control of his body and the image he projects to others.

As a parent, you can:

- Avoid unnecessary arguments about clothing and styles.
- Agree with your teenager on 'codes of dress' that are acceptable to you both. For example, discuss any differences in dress between when your teen is with friends and when he goes out with your family.
- Realize that dress is a reflection of changing self-image. Many teens who frequently change their image are still searching for their identity.
- Help your teen understand that body size is not what determines a person's worth.
- Realize the need to conform is powerful in adolescence.
- Support your teen's constructive efforts at change - e.g., appropriate weight loss - through encouraging good eating habits and family exercise opportunities.

Your teenager is asking himself, "Who am I?", and he is not going to be able to answer that question immediately. It is a question he will ask each day and the answer will probably keep changing for a while.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Fat Jack, by Barbara Cohen.
Hello . . . Wrong Number, by Marilyn Sachs.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Food Makes the Difference: A Parent's Guide to Raising a Healthy Child, by Patricia Kane.
The Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children, by Lynn Leight.

ANOREXIA, BULIMIA: THE EATING DISORDERS

You can never be thin enough. That's what many young people think today. What they eat, when, how much or how little - often is tied to how they look or the image they aspire to.

At different times in your child's life, food has taken on different meanings. As a baby, you were able to satisfy him with food when he cried. Maybe as a young child, you used certain foods as a reward for his good behavior. Now he may not eat just when he is hungry, but perhaps when he's feeling down or upset. And then he gets more upset with himself for having eaten too much.

Dieting has become an obsession for some people. Today's television and film images of thin, stylish models make most young women think about looking that way. Crash diets, strenuous exercises and starvation are all ways in which some girls try to achieve the ideal thinness.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

While most girls try to change their eating habits a bit to achieve the look they want, it is not an overriding concern to them. As many as ten percent of teenage girls, though, start turning all their attention to losing weight. It begins to become an **obsession** and their eating habits can become disturbed.

These eating disorders can also occur in boys, but they are far **more common in girls.** For boys, sports can be the trigger for seeking the perfect weight and body.

Teens with **anorexia** may literally **starve** themselves, afraid that if they eat at all, they will gain weight uncontrollably and become fat. If they have **bulimia**, they may **binge** by eating enormous amounts of food at one time, attempting to feel better about themselves. They later rid themselves of the food by intentional vomiting or by using laxatives.

The similarities between these two disorders are that the suffering person is **preoccupied with weight**. He may exercise excessively and think about food continually, interfering with the rest of his life.

Teens suffering from either disorder do not see themselves or their eating habits realistically. They use food and their eating routines to **control their feelings** or to express them indirectly.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can recognize that eating disorders may stem from:

- Fear of rejection, of not being attractive to the opposite sex.
- Fear of body changes with puberty.
- Difficulty in separating from parents.
- Feelings of being either over-controlled by the family, or isolated from the family.

Your teen will probably keep his eating problems secret, going to great lengths to hide them. This can go on for long periods. Usually, it is not until something goes very wrong that others become aware of the difficulty.

Parents cannot cajole a teen with eating disorders into eating more. Nor can they help him by making mealtimes the focus of the family, forcing him to eat certain portions.

If your teen has an eating disorder, it can be life-threatening. It is important that you seek outside professional help, such as through the Association for Anorectics and Bulimics, or with a counselor.

These are disturbing and growing teenage problems. Help can be found to control your child's eating habits, returning his weight to normal. Beyond that, he can work on the problems in his life which lie behind the eating disorder.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

The Pig Out Blues, by Jan Greenberg.
Solitaire, by Aimee Liu.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

A Parent's Guide to Anorexia and Bulimia, by Katherine Byrnes.
A Parent's Guide to Eating Disorders, by Brett Valette.

TEEN DEPRESSION: FEELING HOPELESS

As your child has grown over the years, you've no doubt been warned about the problems adolescence brings. And now you see the changes first-hand. These changes can be disturbing, but you may shrug them off as just another phase to be endured.

You've probably also heard stories of teen depression and apparent rashes of suicide. You may be concerned. Is your teenager depressed? How can you tell? What can you do to help, if he is?

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Depressed teens often **have felt down** about things **for a long time**. They've felt alone - perhaps dwelling on their problems. Maybe they've been denying them completely.

Most teens are **not as articulate** about their problems as adults might be. They may be **uncertain** of their feelings or how to deal with them. Some may turn to **alcohol or drugs** to feel better artificially. Many do not fully realize the accompanying problems drugs and alcohol bring, substances which only cloud over the real feelings.

It is usually in the midst of a long-term, deep depression that a teen may begin to think about **suicide**. He may see only negative things, forgetting the positives. There are many ways to deal with a problem, and there is always another solution besides suicide. But a teen contemplating taking his life may have only tried one or two other options, and then given up.

Although depression can be temporary, it is important that a depressed teen **talk with someone about it**.

Depressed teens may show certain **signs**:

- Lack of interest in usually enjoyable activities.
- Drop in school performance.
- Restlessness, inability to concentrate.
- Exhaustion - sleeping a lot, staying in bed 'sick' for days.
- Half-mad, half-sad much of the time.
- Withdrawal from others, hanging around the house.
- Sudden turn toward drugs or alcohol.
- Comments from others about his changed behaviors.
- Statements such as, "It's not worth trying anymore," or "I wish I were dead."
- Giving away possessions.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can help your teen, even when the doors seem closed, if you:

- Focus on your teen, not on other problems.
- Don't excuse away behaviors, or deny the signs you see.
- Don't blame your teen for being down, or others for pointing out the problem.
- Tell him what you see and hear. Tell him you are concerned and want to get help.
- Keep listening to what your teen has to say, even if his point of view is different from yours.
- Respect what he says to you.
- Help him understand that he is not crazy or alone. Many teens go through depression. His feelings are real, and he need not feel ashamed or guilty about facing them.
- Check out your own expectations of him to see if they are realistic.
- Encourage him to talk with another adult he feels comfortable with, if it is difficult for you both to talk.
- Are ready to seek outside help - for instance, your family doctor, or local mental health center, who will direct you to a counselor or therapist.

You may want your teen to "straighten up and work things out" quickly. But feelings are part of depression and take time to be worked through. Even though your teen may seem very independent, beyond your reach and not wanting your involvement, he needs you. Help him to get help. Your family deserves to feel better again.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Gimme an H, Gimme an E, Gimme an L, Gimme a P, by Frank Bonham.
Who Killed Christopher?, by Irina Korschunow.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Coping With Teenage Depression: A Parent's Guide, by Kathleen McCoy.
Every Parent's Guide to Understanding Teenagers and Suicide: The Hidden Signs . . . You Can Help, by Marion Crook.

TOO MUCH! HANDLING STRESS

Pressure! Pressure! Pressure! It comes from all sides - from peers to conform, from parents to perform, from schools to be informed. Many teens are driven to compete, achieve and succeed.

Adolescence is not an easy time. Teens' unpredictable moods and shaky sense of identity and self-esteem all contribute to a sense of insecurity.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Teens have a lot of **decisions** to make - about drugs, sex, friends, dates, college, their future. Yet much in their lives seems out of their hands. They may bristle at still being under adult authority.

The **pressure to perform** is massive. Whether it is in sports, academics, or driving, there are endless hurdles to be jumped. But the performance is not solo - it is also competitive. Pitting themselves against others in their grade, weight category, or ranking, teens are forever having to measure up.

Many teens feel the **need to excel**. High parental and self-expectations keep the pressure high. Many are overextended in activities.

The **uncertainty of the future** concerns many teens. Hard as it is for them to make long-term plans, many are apprehensive about their ability to go to college - both getting accepted and having the financial security to attend.

Some teens are dealing with **difficult family situations**, such as divorce, illness, or struggling with a troubled parent.

Any loss can be very stressful. This can be major, such as a death, or a move. Or it might seem minor, such as a lower than expected quiz grade.

Teens don't often recognize the **signs of stress**, but many suffer from nervous stomachs, poor sleep habits, headaches, restlessness, stiff necks, fatigue and a sense of dread.

They often try to make uneasy feelings go away by **avoidance** and **procrastination**. In addition to these non-productive ways, some use destructive coping techniques, such as drinking, doing drugs, or eating more than they should or less than they need.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can:

- Help your teen recognize his particular signs of stress. Try to work with him to identify the sources, and problem-solve ways to handle it.
- Listen to your teen's point of view. He may be coping well with one problem, but bogged down with something you might consider trivial.
- Be supportive of his feelings of hurt, embarrassment or inadequacy. Correct any distortions in thinking.
- Avoid stepping in to solve his problem for him. Trust in his ability to make decisions. Stay in the background as advisor and soundingboard.
- Encourage him to get adequate exercise, rest and food.
- Help him to cultivate enjoyable pastimes.
- Have some laughs with him.
- Avoid using your teen as a confidant in sharing your own problems. If there are family difficulties, provide him with necessary information, but convey the sense that you are handling the situation.
- Avoid comparing your teen to others, or to yourself as a teen.
- Let him see that you are less than perfect, and feel comfortable about the fact.
- Model effective stress management techniques in your own life.
- Help him aspire to realistic goals that are satisfying to him.
- Avoid overlooking or excusing away troublesome behaviors. These can be cries for help.
- Encourage your teen to take pride in his strengths by emphasizing them and supporting him.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Over the Hill, by Jamie Callan.
Wilted, by Paul Kropp.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Helping Your Child Handle Stress, Katherine Kersey, (Ed.).
Stress and Your Child: A Parent's Guide to Symptoms and Strategies, by Ruth Arent.

WHY DO TEENS DRINK?

Alcohol is a common commodity in our society. Beer is widely advertised; there are party wines, champagnes and liquors available to anyone over the legal drinking age. Many parents don't think of alcohol in the same way as they do other drugs. They may see it as more socially acceptable, less harmful and perhaps an essential rite of passsage into adulthood.

When school-age teens start drinking, though, you start to think about some of the disadvantags of alcohol: its ability to dull your teenager's mind and perceptions, its role in driving accidents and lost young lives, and the wrong messages it sends to teens who use it as a way of escaping their problems.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

For today's teens, alcohol is often the **drug of choice**. Drinking is socially acceptable in most teen circles and often a dearly achieved status symbol. Having alcohol to serve your friends is a quick way to gain popularity.

Teenagers often drink for a number of other reasons. Many others do it, it feels like a **challenge**, they want to **test their limits**, they are **bored**. Teens want to feel **independent** of their parents and have heard that alcohol can provide that sense of freedom. Drinking can **calm your nerves** in an awkward social situation. It can also absolve you of any **responsibility** - "I don't even remember what I did."

Teens often do not believe the grave adult warnings about alcohol. They feel **safe** indulging, and like the buzz they soon acquire. They like the **illusion of control** it brings.

Teens have little sense of their own **vulnerability**. They are not good judges of impaired physical reactions and often mix drinking with driving, swimming, diving and other activities that can be life-threatening risks.

Teens who abuse alcohol often think it can **fix most things**, at least temporarily. There are now more than three million teenage alcoholics in the U.S. and the numbers are rising.

Teens who rely on drinking need their parents' help. A teenager with a drinking problem cannot solve it alone.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

Some of the strongest influences on teens come from home. Yet, some parents condone their junior- and senior-high school teens' drinking. They host parties where alcohol is served, have liquor readily available to teens home alone, and permit unsupervised social gatherings.

These parents may mistakenly view their permission to drink as an expression of friendship and understanding toward their children. Some think of it as a way of providing limits, since it is done at home. These parents also signal a message that drinking is necessary to be popular and that laws regarding underage drinking are not to be taken seriously.

Signs that your teen may have difficulty with drinking:

- Does he brag about his drinking prowess or escapades?
- Does he feel he has to drink when he goes to a party?
- Does he get drunk without intending to?
- Does he find himself behaving in ways that he finds unacceptable when sober?
- Does he look forward to being able to drink next time?
- Do you hear from others about things he's done that he does not remember?

As a parent, you can:

- Help your teen realize what or how much he drinks is not as important as when, how often and what happens when he does.
- Support your teen's option of not drinking.
- Practice with your teen situations in which drinking is an alternative. Rehearse ways he can refuse a drink.
- Encourage him to find others who can have a good time without drinking.
- Seek help for your teenager and yourself, if he is developing a drinking problem - e.g., contact your local community drug and alcohol treatment center, or your local chapter of Alateen.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Under the Influence, by William E. Butterworth.
High and Outside, by Linnea Due.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

What, When and How to Talk to Your Children About Alcohol and Other Drugs: A Guide for Parents, by Gail Milgrim.
Young Alcoholics: A Book for Parents, by Jack Mumey.

TEENS AND DRUGS

Everyone has heard about the dangers of drugs - crack, cocaine, marijuana, PCP and steroids. We know they can waste the health and happiness of many teenagers. Drugs keep a lot of people from succeeding in school or at work; they can be life-threatening. Adults are deeply concerned about the contagion of drug abuse among our young people.

Your teenager probably has also heard many exaggerations, half-truths and lies about drugs. He has also heard about the highs, and the ways drugs can loosen him up. He's probably been told that he won't get hooked if he doesn't want to, and that he needs to do drugs to really party. Drugs are also promoted as effective all-night study aids.

At a time when he is particularly concerned about his physical development, a teen who is working out or active in sports may be very vulnerable to the popular myths about steroids. Steroids, which should be taken only under a doctor's care, are, nevertheless, readily available and widely used in athletics. Teens frequently use them for their powerful effects and overlook their disastrous side-effects.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Teens often feel pulled in many directions and are uncertain about choices and decisions.

Adolescence is a difficult time for most young people. There are bound to be problems and setbacks. Some teens react to that **pressure** by wanting to get away from it. They may see drugs as an easy, temporary escape.

Other teens, angry and upset about problems at home or in school, may start doing drugs. It may be a **rebellion** against the things or people that made them mad.

Teens may do drugs to cover some other problem they don't know how to face. Rather than deal with that, they use a drug which alters their mood, taking them away from the reality of the moment. They can **avoid** the feelings temporarily, but drugs don't solve the original problems.

Doing drugs can seem **exciting** and challenging to a teen. He may want to fit in with a drug-dealing crowd for the possibility of money it brings, or for the sense of belonging somewhere.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

You can look for certain signs in your teen:

- Sudden drop in school performance.
- New friends who are into drugs.
- Need for money, or a surplus of it.
- Erratic behavior.
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns.
- Loss of interest in physical appearance.
- Strange objects that may be paraphernalia used with drugs.
- Glazed, distant look.
- Comments from others about your teen's changed attitudes or behaviors.

You can help your teen when you:

- Are informed about drugs. Educate your children.
- Focus on your teen and his problems, not just on surface matters.
- Don't deny what you are seeing.
- Don't take his denials as realistic, if your own doubts continue.
- Tell him what you see, that you are concerned about him and want to seek help.
- Talk with a counselor or a local drug treatment professional, if you have serious concerns.

A teen with a drug problem needs your help; it is not something he can work out by himself. A big part of growing up for a teen is taking control of his life. Why let him give that over to drugs?

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Rock Fever, by Ellen Robinowich.
Angel Dust, by Todd Strasser.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Not My Kid: A Parent's Guide to Kids and Drugs, by Beth Polson.
The Parent's Guide to Teenage Drug Abuse, by Hugh Burns.

WHEN PARENTS DRINK TOO MUCH

"Do my parents drink too much?" Some teens have asked themselves that question over and over again, wondering if their parents have a drinking problem. Parents who drink too much tend to get more involved with alcohol and less involved with work, family and things they formerly enjoyed. Everything becomes less important than drinking.

How can teens know if there is a problem? They might ask themselves:

- Am I worried about my parents' drinking, or how they behave when they drink?
- Am I reluctant to bring friends home because I don't know how my drinking parent might act?
- I somehow believe that my parent's drinking is my fault, or that I can stop it?
- Do I have trouble concentrating at school because I'm thinking about my parent?
- Are my parents depressed or violent when one of them is drinking?
- Do I take on added family responsibilities, trying to make things look normal, even though I know something is wrong?

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Teens often feel **responsible** for changing their drinking parents' behavior. They may try to stop them from drinking or distract them with other activities. They often try to take care of them, making excuses for them or staying home to fill in the missing adult role. They may also feel guilty for causing, or adding to, the drinking parents' problems.

Some teens **doubt their own perceptions** of what is happening, especially when the family denies something is wrong. Teens then tend to stifle their feelings, keeping the family secret and pretending everything is fine. They can lose confidence in their own judgment. Some may turn to the very dangerous outlet of drinking themselves.

Teens cannot take care of their parents, even though someone who drinks too much may expect that. Teens who are forced into **premature parent roles** miss their own childhood.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can help teens set realistic expectations for themselves. They cannot cure a parent who drinks too much. This behavior is caused by a disease called alcoholism, which needs to be treated.

- Listen to your teen. Acknowledge his concern.
- Don't blame him for raising the issue.
- Don't blame yourself for not shielding him from the problem.
- Don't pretend that everything is all right.
- Don't hold him to keeping the family secret.
- Encourage your teen to learn about alcoholism.
- Read about it together, if possible.
- Have your teen seek help, perhaps through your local Alcoholics Anonymous group. Alateen, AA's self-help group for teens, is active in many communities.
- Seek help for your family. Dealing with a family member who drinks too much takes commitment from the whole family.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

The Boy Who Drank Too Much, by Sheppard M. Greene.
A Day at a Time: Dealing With an Alcoholic, by Jane C. Miner.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Children of Alcoholism: A Survivor's Manual, by Judith Seixas.
Children of Alcoholics: A Guidebook for Parents, by Janie Rossi Hart.

CHILD ABUSE

There is a good deal written about child abuse these days. The latest statistics indicate that a growing number of adults within a family take inappropriate action against children. Some are beaten in anger (physical abuse), others are used to satisfy adult sexual needs (sexual abuse), or are verbally attacked with insults and put-downs that damage their self-esteem (psychological abuse).

These are very serious situations. We are not talking about some parents who spank their young child or push their teen once in a bad temper. That is not considered physical abuse. The parent who criticizes a teen is not committing psychological abuse. We are talking about teens who are injured or are regularly bruised or beaten by adults. We are talking about a teen who is approached by an adult seeking sexual involvement. We are talking about ongoing verbal harassment unrelentingly thrown at a teen, causing him to feel poorly about himself.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Teens who have been abused usually feel as if they are in some way **at fault**. If they have been sexually abused, they often have a strong sense of guilt about participating in illicit activities.

Some teens **minimize** the situation to protect their parent. They often fear that exposure will destroy the family. By minimizing or denying the abuse, they also bury feelings and reactions that may be too painful or powerful to deal with.

Some abused teens run the risk of becoming **abusers** themselves, if they strongly identify with the abuser. Not wanting to be a victim any longer, they may see no other option available to them except abusing someone else.

Others run the risk of seeking mates who **repeat the abusing patterns**, since that is the family structure they intuitively recognize.

Many abused teens are at a **distance from their own feelings**. They have had their trust in adults abused, and often feel they cannot trust their own instincts.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

Teens have a right to get away from an abusive situation. You can help them realize that they are not helping anyone by protecting an abuser, preventing a scene, or trying to shield another child.

It is important that an abused teen talk with someone who understands. Asking for help may bring an angry or unbelieving response, perhaps because the listener is frightened or unfamiliar with appropriate actions. It is essential that the teen keep trying until he finds someone to listen. It is critical for him to get help.

As a parent, it is important to know that:

- Abuse can occur any time from infancy through adolescence. It is often not a single incident.
- Many adult abusers were abused themselves.
- Most abusers know the child and are often a trusted authority figure or family member.
- Abuse occurs in all kinds of families.
- Most abusers benefit from counseling.
- Abuse is never the child's fault. No matter how provocative teens are or how much they seem to ask for it, abuse is always the adult's responsibility.

To provide protection for your teens:

- Prevent them from being victims by teaching them that no one has the right to touch them without their permission.
- Teach them not to keep a secret that disturbs them - to tell a trusted adult.
- Believe them if they tell you about an abusive episode.
- Protect them immediately. Report the suspected abuse to a local authority, such as the Department of Social Services, or Juvenile Protective Services.
- Allow your teens to express their feelings, which may be mixed.
- Seek professional help for your teen and your family. Don't give in to a tendency to try to forget about it.

Once you've sought help, don't allow the abuse to stigmatize your teen or your family. Try to resume as normal and routine a family life as possible.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Step on a Crac [illegible]y Mary Anderson.
The Lottery Rose, [illegible]y Irene Hunt.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Silent Children, A Parent's Guide to Prevention of Child Abuse, by Linda Sanford.
Protect Your Child From Sexual Abuse: A Parent's Guide, by Janie Rossi Hunt.

WHEN PARENTS CAN'T HELP

Many adults think teenagers naturally turn to their parents when they have a problem they need to talk about. For some teens, though, this doesn't work. Their parents may not be able to respond to their children's need to talk because they are overwhelmed with their own situation.

Unfortunately, some parents may be ill, either physically or mentally. Others are too busy to help, aren't home enough to talk to, or may not see their teens on a regular basis.

In some families, foreign-born parents may not understand their teen's problems at school or in the neighborhood.

Almost all parents care very much, but some may not be able to communicate well because they're uncomfortable with the topic, or feel they don't have the necessary knowledge or skills. Some parents want to help, but do not know how.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

All children **expect their parents to be available** to them, and can have mixed emotions when they're not.

Some teens **assume parents should take the first step** in communicating, and feel rejected if they don't.

Other teens **overestimate the extent to which they have tried to initiate conversations**. In reality, they may not have given their parents much chance to respond.

Some teens send **mixed signals** to parents. Even though they really want contact, they may assure a parent they have no need for closeness.

A teen whose parents can't help needs to **recognize his own feelings**. These may be anger, hurt, disappointment, embarrassment, loneliness and guilt for having these feelings. These are all natural reactions.

In some families, teens may **reverse roles** and wind up parenting their dysfunctional mother or father. They may also take on other parental responsibilities for siblings and care of the house.

Some teens are **victims of their parent's abuse or neglect**. They may continue to tolerate it, thinking they are responsible for holding the family together.

Many teens in troubled families **feel they must keep their problem a secret** - maintaining a smooth surface becomes all important.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

When parents can't help, teens need to be encouraged to:

- Move away from blaming their parents. Most parents would help, if they could.
- Realize they are not responsible for causing their parent's problem, nor can they solve it.
- Attempt conversations when they have time to talk.
- Try to avoid attacking in arguments.
- Be specific - say what the problem is, how they feel about it, and ask their parents to solve it with them.
- Be willing to hear their parents' thoughts.
- Look for another trusted adult.
- Realize that they are responsible for their own actions and their own happiness.
- Recognize that they don't help anyone in their family by keeping family problems secret.
- Keep searching until they find an adult who will listen.

As a parent, you may not have realized your teen thought of you as unavailable. Make time for him, even if he is unresponsive on the surface. Try to develop a mutually enjoyable pastime.

If the adults in your family have serious personal problems, try to seek professional help. When one family member is troubled, usually everyone else in the family is affected.

If you and your teen just can't communicate, consider seeking help. Encourage him to talk with another trusted adult.

If you live at a distance, maintain regular contact by telephone or letter, just to stay in touch.

If you are an adult who is approached by a teen in need of help, it is important to take his concerns seriously. Act on the information and help him seek appropriate assistance, such as through his pastor, school counselor, or other relevant community agencies.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

Where the Elf King Sings, by Judie Wolkoff.
Kind Hearts and Gentle Monsters, by Laurence Yep.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Understanding Children and Youth With Emotional and Behavioral Problems, by Paul Zions.
Criticizing Children: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children, by Avi Shulman.

RUNNING AWAY

More than one million children and adolescents run away from home each year in America. The number continually rises, as do the problems these youth are running from. The three national runaway hotlines report a total of approximately 1,000 calls a day.

Runaways are people under 18, who leave home at least overnight, without their parent's permission. They are often called 'throwaways' or 'pushouts', since many of their families are troubled and unable to deal with their problems. They come from all social, ethnic, religious and financial backgrounds.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Teens run away when they **cannot cope** with ongoing problems. Often there is a breakdown in communication, with parent and child frustrated, angry and scared.

Many runaway teens are from families that cannot function well because of a **crisis** or **unresolved difficulties**, such as those related to alcoholism, divorce, poverty or frequent moves.

Many of these teens are running from **physical or sexual abuse**. Some have overwhelming problems with the law, school or their peers.

These teens feel **frightened, unloved and abandoned**. They often report that they feel they have no real home. Many also have not found other supportive adults among their relatives, at school or their church.

When teens run away, they usually **have not made any advance plans**. They have not realistically anticipated how they will meet their basic needs for food, money, and most important, a safe place to stay.

Most teens who do run away stay with a friend and **return home after a few days**.

Teens who do not return home usually become **street kids**. Those few become adept at managing to live on the streets.

Many **feel there is no other way out - no way home**. Some become involved in prostitution, gangs and drug dealing to survive - choices that can complicate existing problems.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can:

- Work to form a bond of mutual trust between you and your teen.
- Nurture your relationship with him.
- Try to work out any ongoing family problems. Teens need a strong, stable parent.
- Get to know your teen's friends. Make them feel welcome.
- Connect his growing desire for independence with appropriate responsibilities.
- Help your teen to face his problems. Let him know that mistakes can be ways of learning.
- Talk and listen. Hear what he is saying. If you can't get through to him, encourage him to talk with another trusted adult.
- Seek help, if you are concerned, before your teen runs away.

You can become familiar with resources for runaways. Centers are open twenty-four hours a day. They provide an assessment of problems, and provide food and housing.

The centers offer crisis hotlines, and a link between a teen and his parents. Many offer counseling and referrals for medical and legal assistance. Some offer educational programs and pre-employment assistance.

Parents are contacted and involved in trying to resolve the family conflict. Many centers are able to return 80% of their youth to homes of parents, relatives or friends.

Whether he runs away or is thrown out, a teen needs to feel he can come back. Always "leave the door open."

Suggested Readings for Teens:

The Butterfly Girl, by Blossom Elfman.
Turn the Page, Wendy, by Margaret Hill.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Runaway Road, by Stan Mack.
Preventing Missing Children, by Gerald Arenberg.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS: GETTING ALONG

If your teen has a brother or sister, it is probably the closest relationship they both know. It can be both a pleasure and a pain. Sometimes they are the only person to turn to. Other times it may seem as though they were created just to inflict misery. There is probably no one in the world that is hated so often or forgiven so much. It may be that those feelings are mutual.

One important bond between siblings is that they are both in the same boat together. They have either been born into or brought into your family and they are in it together now. Even though that was not their decision, they do have a choice about how bearable they want to make things - how well they want to get along.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

No matter what their birth order, most teens feel **dissatisfied**. If they are the oldest, they see the disadvantages of being called upon to be most responsible. They see themselves as having to pave the way while the younger ones are babied. If they are the youngest, they see the disadvantages of hand-me-downs, a lot of bosses and fewer privileges than their older siblings.

Competition is an issue with some teens, particularly if they have a sibling of the same sex, or are close in age. They may compete for your attention. Sometimes they look to get their brother or sister in trouble so you will think better of them by comparison.

Some teens are **angry** at their brother or sister just for being in the way. They are hypercritical of the way their sibling reflects poorly on the family image.

Many families **label** their children. "He has the brains in the family. She's the stubborn one. He's the lazy one." Teens may have come to believe those labels about themselves and their siblings. A child may end up being lazy because that's what everyone in the family seems to expect of him. Or he may minimize his talents because another sibling has been identified as claiming that talent.

Some teens feel **betrayed** by their brother or sister. For teens, privacy and confidentiality are critical. Siblings who don't respect those needs lose a teen's trust.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

Sibling rivalry is unnecessarily expected and even inadvertently encouraged in some families. Through competition and comparisons, siblings may vie against each other. Sometimes parents only pay attention to teens when arguments erupt.

As a parent, you can:

- Expect disagreements. People who live close together will always have some things to quarrel over.
- Encourage your teen to negotiate with his brother or sister. Try not to step in. Support their ability to work things out.
- Make sure, if you do step into a sibling argument, that the solution is one that you can live with, but does not favor one child over the other. If you make your decision mildly distasteful to both, they may be encouraged to solve it themselves next time.
- Consider whether your teen seems continually angry at his sibling; if so, it may be misplaced anger. He may be angry at himself or at you. Talk seriously with him. His sibling may only be a safe target.
- Make every child's success a family success. Have everyone rejoice in individual accomplishments. There can be many winners.
- Make sure your teen's privacy and confidentiality are respected. Telephone privacy - without eavesdropping, repeating conversations or rudely interrupting - is a prime way to show family respect for a teen's needs.

Even if your children have different interests, talents and personalities, they have an enormous impact on each other's lives, whether they realize it or not.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

What's the Matter With the Dobsons?, by Hila C. Colman.
The Hand-Me-Down Kid, by Francine Pascal.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Siblings Without Rivalry, by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish.
Family Constellation, by Walter Toman.

HANDLING ANGER

Can you recall the temper tantrums your child may have had as a toddler? Do you remember the awful frustration you felt in not being able to stop them? Maybe you felt like having a tantrum right along with your child. Teenage anger often evokes a similar response in parents. Adolescent mood swings, criticisms, gripes and complaints are very different from calmer pre-teen days. And they often summon up a responding turmoil in parents.

For teens, anger is often a reaction to what they see as limits on their freedom. It also provides them with an energy to break away from childhood ways to try new things. Adolescents tend to see things in black and white, without varying shades of grey. They frequently have a strong sense of justice, and can be very judgmental of others. Their friends are going through the same emotional swings, causing tensions which easily spill over into angry outbursts. All of these reflect the inner turbulence of adolescence.

THE TEENS' POINT OF VIEW

Teens feel angry for many **reasons** - parent pressures, problems with friends, teacher reactions, or their own expectations. Sometimes that anger is directed internally, which can lead to depression. Other times it's directed outwardly, causing them to lash out.

Feelings of anger are **natural**, although many of us were taught that anger is wrong. It is a response to pain. There are times when it's appropriate - for instance, being put down for no reason, or as a response to something unfair. Rather than denying anger, it is important to focus on ways to channel it.

Anger can be **constructive**. What is destructive are certain ways of expressing it: physical attacks, shouting matches or cutting remarks. When teens feel uncomfortable expressing anger, they may resort to indirect but damaging activities such as drugs, alcohol or overeating.

To be constructive, teens need to use the **power of their anger to work on the problem**. Too often, they attack the other person, not the problem. Angry attacks usually generate angry responses.

Teens sometimes **over-react** to situations. By reading too much into other people's actions, being hypersensitive to remarks or thoughtlessness, teens can work up resentment.

60

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, you can try to:

- Model appropriate ways of expressing anger.
- If either or both of you have not handled an angry situation well, talk with your teen about it calmly at another time. Together, analyze ways it might have turned out differently.
- Apologize if your own anger has been misdirected or inappropriate.
- Avoid physical attacks by anyone.
- Encourage constructive outlets for anger - e.g., writing down the problem, counting to ten, pounding a pillow or tearing up newspapers.
- Channel arguments into problem solving, not attacking each other.
- Work with your teen to find out what he wants to change and what he is really trying to say.
- Read between the lines of what is said and what is not. Check with him on what you think you heard.
- Agree to disagree when necessary. You can have opposing points of view.
- Come to a resolution that leaves you both feeling that you've been heard and valued.
- Agree to try the resolution and then to talk again.

Helping your teen control his anger doesn't mean swallowing feelings. It means making good use of them.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

The Ape Inside Me, by Kim Platt.
You Never Lose, by Barbara Stretton.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Parent-Child Interaction and Youth Rebellion, by Marianne Marschak.
Managing Parental Anger, by Harriet Barrish.

SEEKING AND FINDING HELP

Parents realize that many problems in adolescence go with rapid growth and changes, yet you may still find yourself unsure of the significance of what you see in your teenager.

SIGNS THAT A TEEN NEEDS HELP

Your teen may be:

- Doing poorly with school work.
- Disinterested in school, with irregular attendance.
- Withdrawn.
- Fighting with other family members.
- Aggressive towards others or their property.
- In trouble with the law.
- A danger to himself or others.
- Showing abrupt mood swings or personality changes.
- Feeling not in control of sexual activity.
- Feeling sad or mad much of the time.
- Feeling hopeless or depressed.
- Chronically acting irresponsible or immature.
- Having difficulty with friends.
- Suddenly changing peer group.
- Abusing drugs, alcohol or food.
- Having sleep difficulties.
- Disinterested in physical appearance.
- Feeling 'sick' for days on end.
- Struggling with a particular situation, such as a death, recent move, family divorce or trauma.
- Asking for help, wanting to change.

WHO IS MOST VULNERABLE?

Some adolescents are more likely than others to need help, such as those who:

- Have very low self-esteem.
- Do not anticipate a positive future.
- Do not feel they have control over their actions or lives.
- Have one or both parents with a history of depression or other affective disorders.
- Have no open communication with a supportive adult.
- Have had long term difficulties in school performance.
- Have had long term difficulties sustaining friendships.
- Have had traumatic experiences, such as loss of a parent or close friend.

Teens are **not to blame** for their emotional problems. Placing blame on anyone does not solve problems or ease the pain.

Teens in need of help **cannot will their troubles away**. They cannot just 'pick themselves up by the bootstraps.'

Most teens will **not openly ask for help**. They often do not realize their destructive behaviors are **indirect cries for help**. They **need strong adults** who will affirm their authority and show their commitment to working through the problems together. Strong action taken by an adult in a crisis is a very reassuring message to teens.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

As a parent, it is hard to realize when your child needs help. It is very difficult to be objective about your teen's problems. You may think you're making too much of something insignificant, yet you worry when things don't seem right. A competent professional can provide reassurance, and help to evaluate the seriousness of the problem.

Unfortunately, many parents let denial take over, excusing and looking away from warning signs. Your child's school attendance officer or the local police may be the ones who flag the problem. Even when parents have not recognized previous difficulties, they should heed these warnings as signals to seek professional help.

Many parents are overwhelmed by guilt - "Where have I failed my child?" But it is important to note that many teens and their families are faced with hard life situations. Teens also are affected by many factors apart from their parents, from innate traits to social influences. They may not be able to cope with them on their own.

All kinds of families have troubled teens. Some families are warm and supportive. Others are troubled themselves, perhaps by crises, changes or adult problems. When any family member has emotional problems, they usually affect the rest of the family.

Parents need not feel a sense of shame or stigma in seeking psychological professional help for their teen any more than they would in getting medical care for him when he is physically ill.

It is up to parents to take the initiative. Rarely will a teen ask for intervention. Usually he will deny or minimize the seriousness of the situation. In talking with their teen, parents need to convey several messages: what they see and are concerned about, and their commitment to working with him to resolve the problem.

In explaining what to expect, parents need to be open and straightforward in their approach, trying to avoid deception as well as confrontation. They can reassure their teen that he is not crazy. They can also let him know seeking help is the right next step.

After arranging an appointment with a professional, there will most likely be at least several sessions. Probably both the teen and his parents, either together or separately, will talk with the professional. After hearing the assessment, the parents and their teen can together decide what next steps to take.

Sometimes the results of an evaluation may suggest that no further treatment is needed, and the families may be supplied with information about community resources or educational recommendations.

WHERE TO FIND HELP

You can first gather information. Talk with your teen's teachers and other adults involved in his activities. Have they observed problems, too? Or are the problems enmeshed between you and your teen, or responses to family tensions?

Have your family doctor give your teen a complete physical examination. This will identify or eliminate any unknown physical cause of difficulty.

Ask your doctor, school guidance counselor and other parents for names of professional referrals. You can check with your church or synagogue for pastoral counseling. Look for a name that has been recommended by more than one person.

Find out what resources are available in your community. If you live near a university hospital, ask about their department of psychiatry. Local general hospitals with psychiatric units or private psychiatric hospitals usually can refer you to practicing therapists or counselors. Professional societies frequently have referral services, such as the State Psychological Association.

If there is a United Way office in your community, it may have lists of mental health centers and local family support services. Many organizations, some with religious affiliation, have counseling. Individual therapists also have private practices, either by themselves or with a group of other clinicians. The Mental Health Department of your county or city government can refer you to the publicly funded programs in your area.

It is important to realize that not all these resources will be able to offer the same services. The level of appropriate treatment will depend on the seriousness of the problem.

Be aware of finances. Check what, if any, applicable insurance coverage you have. Ask each referral for fee schedules, including any financial aid or sliding scale payments that might be available.

There are several categories of professionals who usually specialize in work with adolescents:

- Psychiatrists - hold a medical degree and should be board certified. They can offer physical and psychiatric assessments. They are the only ones of the following categories able to prescribe medication, if needed.
- Psychologists - hold a doctorate and should be state licensed. They are knowledgeable about psychological development and treatment. Many also specialize in educational assessment for learning disabilities.
- Social Workers - hold master's or doctoral level degree and should be state licensed in child and/or family therapy. They usually have a strong family treatment focus.
- Clinical Nurse Specialists - hold a master's level nursing degree and should have advanced certification in child and adolescent specialties. They usually have a holistic, family-oriented approach.

When you have identified a few professionals, talk with them by telephone. Try to find one whose philosophy you share and whose approach you agree with. This will depend greatly on your individual family and values. Finding someone you and your teen can feel comfortable with is vital in establishing the trust that is essential in successful therapy.

You can expect that the therapeutic process will take time. Remember that your teen's troubles have taken a long time to build to the present level. They won't suddenly vanish.

Your expectations need to be realistic. You can't expect a perfectly docile, mature adolescent to emerge. What you probably can anticipate is a gradual reduction in your teen's anxieties, improvement in his personal appearance, better sleep habits, and more regular school performance.

You can expect more trustworthy behavior and less family tension as everyone talks and listens more effectively with each other.

There are several kinds of treatment available, including:

- Outpatient Care - where a teen and perhaps his family, attend regular sessions in a professional's office. When problems are identified early, this can be highly effective.

  Outpatient programs might be in the form of:

  - Individual therapy - where a client meets individually with a therapist on a regular basis.
  - Group therapy - where several clients meet together with a therapist to share common problems, experiences and provide feedback to each other.
  - Family therapy - where one, several or all family members meet together or in separate sessions with a therapist to work on common familiar issues.

- Specialized programs for treatment of specific disorders - such as an eating disorder or drug abuse program which may combine individual, group, and family therapies with educational approaches.

- Emergency Access - Parents may be faced with an unexpected crisis, such as a teen's attempted suicide. In such a case, parents should seek immediate treatment of some kind. A most likely route would be a general hospital emergency room. After the teen has been medically treated, he should be evaluated before being released. General hospitals usually have a psychiatrist available to them, even if one is not on staff. After a psychiatric evaluation is made, a recommendation will be made either to have the teen return home in the care of his parents, or be medically cleared for admission to another facility.

- Inpatient Care - where a teen is hospitalized for an acute psychiatric problem. Often this follows emergency treatment.

- Residential Care - where a teen is treated in a live-in, less intense, longer-term treatment facility.

Both inpatient and residential treatment involve problems such as drug or alcohol addiction, eating disorders, dangerous behaviors toward self or others, total lack of communication with any supportive adult, or, in a small percentage of the adolescent population, mental illness.

Many teens go in and out of therapy over the course of several years, as they come to recognize a growing awareness and need for clarity in resolving their struggles.

While seeking help may be difficult, it can be a very effective way to stay in tune with your teen.

Suggested Readings for Teens:

What Happens in Therapy, by Sara Gilbert Lee, Lothrop and Shepard Books, NY, 1982.

Suggested Readings for Parents:

Making Therapy Work: Your Guide to Choosing, Using and Ending Therapy, by F. Bruckner, et al.

The Outpatient Center for Children and Adolescents at Sheppard Pratt Hospital provides a full range of mental health services for young people and their families. Call Dr. Joy Silberg at (301) 938-3000, extension 4974 (or secretary at 938-4900) for further information.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere gratitude to the following faculty and consultants of the Sheppard Pratt's National Center for Human Development who have generously and capably contributed their ideas, concerns and expertise:

Sgt. John Baker
Randy Berger, M.D.
Donna Bickley, L.C.S.W., C.A.C.
Martha Bonds, B.A.
Joyce Bowen, B.A.
Marion Brown, B.A.
Maxie Collier, M.D.
Josephine Donovan, Ph.D.
Trish Gaffney, L.C.S.W., C.A.C.
Harinder Ghuman, M.D.
Diane Gibson, M.S., O.T.R.
Theophilus Green, Ph.D.
Beth Greenland, M.S.
Gail Guttman, L.C.S.W.
John Hildreth
Chaya Kaplan, L.C.S.W.
Sgt. William Lawson
Greg Lehne, Ph.D.
Joseph Leitzer
Shelby Lewis, M.D.
John McQuade
Mat Merker, R.N.
Israela Meyerstein, L.C.S.W.
Jeffrey Moss, Ph.D.
Janet Pabst, B.S.
Maxine Parker
Thomas Pentz, Ph.D.
Richard Perlmutter, M.D.
Sheridan Phillips, Ph.D.
Diane Pomerantz, Ph.D.
Melvin Prosen, M.D.
David Roth, Ph.D.
Elizabeth Ryder, R.N., M.A.
P. Barrett Rudd, D.Min.
Lynne Salkowski, M.S.
Richard Sarles, M.D.
Kenneth Sharoff, Ph.D.
Janice Shriver, D.S.W.
Joyanna Silberg, Ph.D.
Sharon Warren, M.D.
Peter Williams, M.D.

The following organizations reviewed and endorsed the content for the teen telephone tape library:

American Academy of Pediatrics, Maryland Chapter
American Council on Alcoholism, Inc.
Association for Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia, Maryland Chapter
Association of Children & Adults with Learning Disabilities
Association for Education of Young Children, Maryland Chapter
Association of Independent Maryland Schools
Baltimore City Department of Social Services, Adult & Family Services
Baltimore City Public Schools
Baltimore County Bureau of Mental Health
Baltimore County Department of Health
Baltimore County Public Schools, Psychological Services
Baltimore's Child, Inc.
Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Central Maryland
Boy Scouts of America, Baltimore Area Council
The Children's Guild, Inc.
Compassionate Friends, Inc.
Community Information Services, Health & Welfare Council
Council for Exceptional Children, Baltimore City Chapter
Cult Awareness Network
Cultural Arts Institute
Family & Children's Services, Central Maryland
Friends of the Family
Gay & Lesbian Community Center
Girl Scouts of Central Maryland, Inc.
Governor's Office for Children & Youth
March of Dimes
Maryland Action to Prevent Child Abuse, Inc.
Maryland Committee for Children
Maryland State Department of Education
Maryland State Department of Health & Mental Hygiene
Maryland State Department of Human Resources,
  Social Services Administration
Maryland State Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities
Mental Health Association of Metropolitan Baltimore
Mothers Against Drunk Drivers of Northern Maryland
National Committee on Youth Suicide Prevention
Overeaters Anonymous
Parents & Friends of Lesbians & Gays
Parents Without Partners
Planned Parenthood, Maryland Chapter
PTA Council, Baltimore County
Stepfamily Association of America
Toughlove Group
Urban League, Baltimore Chapter
YMCA of Greater Baltimore

For More Information
About Educational Programs
For Children & Adolescents:

The Sheppard Pratt National Center for Human Development
6501 N. Charles Street • P.O. Box 5503
Baltimore, Maryland 21285-5503
(301) 938-3908 • Toll Free 800-627-0550 Ex. 3900